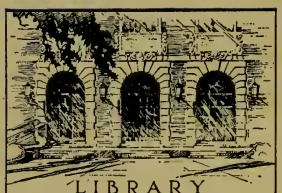

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THE

MANNERS OF THE DAY.

CHAPTER I.

Behold advancing
Modern men and women dancing!
Step and dress alike express
Male and female awkwardness.
Without a hoop without a ruffle,
One eternal jig and shuffle:
Where's the air? and where's the gait?
Where's the feather in the hat?
Where's the frizz'd toupée? and where,
Oh! where's the powder for their hair?
Where are all their ancient graces?
Where three quarters of their faces?
With half the forehead lost and half the chin,
We know not where they end, and where begin.

Miss Fanshawe.

THE following morning Lord Barton's political intelligence was most flatteringly, but most unseasonably confirmed. At an early hour an express from England arrived at Willersdale

Castle, with an autograph letter from an illustrious hand; claiming, both as a personal friend, and as a friend to his country, the immediate attendance and services of Lord Willersdale. Nor did the diplomatic caution of the new minister repress the honest acknowledgment of his pride and gratification, on this fresh evidence of the esteem and confidence of his sovereign.

Instantly despatching a messenger to precede and facilitate the progress of his journey, Lord Willersdale made hasty arrangements for leaving the castle at midnight; previous to which hour, the arrival of his principal guests would have secured the embarrassed Helen from the annoyance of playing the hostess to total strangers. Sir William de Broke, and one or two young men from Dublin, had already made their appearance; but these, as permanent visitors, she turned over to the attentions of their friend, Captain Mordaunt; earnestly entreating, in a hurried note, that Lady Theodosia, or Lady Isabella, or both, would come and bear her company, and assist her to entertain the multitude of her unknown acquaintance.

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Lady Isabella desired no better *passe-temps*; and leaving Lord Barton and her sister to the occupation of deploring, during her absence, the tone of levity she had adopted during her residence in Paris, she betook herself to the river, with little Algernon and her French maid; and astonished the Connaught bargemen, by joining in the chorus of the *Barcarolle.*

Batêlier!" dit Lisette
Je voudrois passer l'eau,
Mais je suis trop pauvrette
Pour payer le bâteau.

She became, however, of real service to Lady Willersdale, by inquiring into the arrangements of her *fête*, and by instructing Vernon to remedy various important deficiencies; while Helen herself was occupied in receiving Lord W.'s instructions as to her own journey, and in the expression of those inquietudes which depressed her affectionate heart in the prospect of even so short a separation. It was settled between them that Captain Mordaunt should afford them his protection during their route; Mr. Edwards, under the influence of Lady

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Theodosia's counsels, having already accorded his sanction to the departure of Florence.

Nor was this the only victory which Lady Theodosia's influence had obtained over his opinions. She had already persuaded him to gratify her warm desire of imparting to Florence herself some insight into her real position; and Miss Dudley, in the triumph of finding her sensitive apprehensions of the stain of illegitimacy unfounded, was perhaps the happiest of all the happy multitude, who regarded the day of the Willersville ball as *par excellence un jour de fête.* Not even the new premier, with a royal despatch dignifying his pocket, felt half so proud, or half so deeply penetrated.

At length the long anticipated hour of festivity arrived. The Castle assumed a blaze of illumination, tempered by profuse wreaths of evergreens, and winter flowers; the band of the county yeomanry was stationed in the great hall; the saloon and two adjoining galleries had been decorated as ball-rooms; and Vernon having marshalled his numerous forces, had the

happiness of greeting the coming wheels of the earliest carriage;—as a matter of course, that of the Bishop's primitive widow.

It was the first time that Captain Mordaunt had seen his sister in all the honours of her matronly toilet; and albeit unused to note the minutia of feminine fashions, he could not but observe that Helen, in her spotless folds of bridal satin, profusely enriched with that far famed redundance of family diamonds, originally recorded by Sir Stephen's paternal vigilance—while the light flowing of her soft brown hair waved round her sweet and delicate countenance in wild profusion—was the very fairest creature on whom his eyes had ever rested. Old O'Mahony who had posted herself on the stairs to bless her graceful footsteps as they passed, became speechless with delight; and when Florence Dudley emerged from the hands of Mademoiselle Florentine in her simple white dress, with a branch of natural arbutus woven amid her raven tresses, the old woman was for the first time compelled to acknowledge her original "darlin" fairly eclipsed by the charms of the lady of her lord.

Yet never had Florence appeared in higher beauty; a rich carnation, arising from the excitement of her recent explanation, streamed upon her cheek; and her movements were buoyant with her secret sense of happiness. She felt that the presence of a single person was alone wanting to complete the pleasure of her evening; but she reproved herself for even this momentary discontent; and when on Lady Theodosia's arrival she flew to welcome her with graceful assiduity, Lord Barton, however predetermined to withhold his admiration from his sister's idol, frankly confessed that he had never beheld a living figure so bright with ideal beauty. Although the saloon was already nearly filled, Lady Isabella had not yet deigned to make her appearance. The elaborate graces of her Parisian toilet probably required a more than ordinary period of indulgence; for little Algernon in his scarlet *blouse* and mechlin *jabot*, was already intruding himself into every quadrille, and provoking the secret rage of half the young ladies who caressed him as "a dear little angel;" while Count Vyvyan himself, gracefully bestowed the smiles of his bland

mansuetude upon the O'Gorman party;—the only ladies present to whom he felt that he could render himself agreeable *sans déroger*.

Lady Willersdale, who discovered that her husband was too much occupied in receiving congratulatory compliments, and Lady Theodosia too kindly busied in attentions towards some of the less illustrious guests, to enact their promised parts of master and mistress of the ceremonies towards herself, was beginning to long for the arrival of the lively Lady Isabella, to affix names and definitions to some of the extraordinary portraits in the living gallery around her. But in the course of a few minutes, she found herself lightly touched on the shoulder with a bunch of Bengal roses; and Lady Isabella, *mise et coiffée à ravir*, with all that fairy precision of neatness and compactness which Parisian fingers can alone achieve,—and leaning on the arm of a handsome young stranger,—gaily accosted her.

"I have been yawning full dressed in my dressing-room these two hours, waiting the arrival of this especial monster; and by way of punishment for his sins, my dear Lady Willers-

dale, I shall not favour him with an introduction to you. Now Harry, hold your tongue! if you recommence that volume of prose about a broken post-chaise and a staggering horse, I will give up your cause altogether. What business has a lover with horses and post-chaises? you should have come on the beams of a shooting star, or on the wings of a carrier pigeon."

"Since Lady Isabella will say nothing in my favour," said the young stranger, gracefully addressing Lady Willersdale, "I trust your ladyship will permit me to thank you in person for the hospitable kindness with which you have enabled me to evade my uncle's sentence of banishment from Mitford Lodge. I should have found it difficult indeed to remain quietly in Dublin, with the certainty that De Broke, and Daly, and so many others of my friends, were dancing at Willersdale Castle." His eye involuntarily glanced round the room as he spoke, and rested upon the lovely figure of Florence Dudley; who, wholly unsuspicious of his presence, was listlessly leaning upon the arm of Lord Barton.

Lord Willersdale, who had already undertaken to plead Harry Mitford's cause with his friend the General, now arrived, upon the summons of Lady Isabella; and begging the young soldier would follow him fearlessly to the field, he led him towards the further end of one of the galleries, where General Mitford, Mr. Daly, the right reverend mother, and a Clonfert spinster, were deep in the meditative mysteries of whist.

"My dear Mitford, I am anxious to present to you a guest and *protégé* of mine, for whom I bespeak your indulgence. Pray understand that he has been brought here, against his will, by a special intercession of mine to the Lord-Lieutenant; and chiefly because Lady Isabella Vyvyan threatened to send us an excuse, unless I insured Mr. Mitford for her partner."

"*Harry!*" exclaimed the General, who had trumped his partner's king during this perplexing prologue, "By God! Sir—"

"How! General Mitford!" interrupted Lady Willersdale, who had accompanied the mischievous Lady Isabella, to witness the event of her manœuvre, "would you have had *your* nephew

withstand the united commands of two fair ladies, and the pressing invitation of one of your oldest friends?"

General Mitford, appeased by the smiles of the beautiful being who addressed him with so much persuasive sweetness, checked his momentary anger. In truth, he had from the beginning of the evening felt vexed and mortified by the absence of his young and distinguished-looking heir from a county meeting of this brilliant description; and the unexpected arrival of his favourite and family-representative, was an offence easily forgiven.

"Well, well! since your ladyship and my friend Willersdale have united to overturn my authority, I suppose I must be cheated out of my approbation to the plot. Go your ways, sir!" said he, heartily shaking his nephew by the hand, "Go your ways into the dancing-room, as becomes your age; and when next you wish to cajole me into a sanction of your insubordination, do not interrupt me in the middle of my first rubber."

And now, who so happy, so joyous in his voice and aspect as the young aid-de-camp?—who

so startled, so gratified, so bewildered, as the blushing Florence?—She readily forgave Lady Isabella all the *persiflage* with which she had tormented her during her visit to the Lodge; who, having ocularly satisfied herself that the wild Irish muse could be as easily touched and agitated as the less gifted of her sex, was quite content to take Lady Willersdale's arm, and make a voyage of discovery through the crowd which now filled the apartments.

"Look!" she whispered, "*pray* look at Lady Sophia Surface's deprecating smiles to the O'Gorman set. Knowing them for the finest of the fine, she is affecting a holy horror of the heterogeneous mixture inevitable in a provincial ball: and talking to them of 'the Castle,' and Almack's, in the vain hope that one of their male danglers will take pity upon either of her flaxen-haired, pale, withered, insipid daughters; those two little miseries by her side, who have just the air of superannuated white mice."

"The O'Gormans are handsome, showy looking girls."

"Yes, showy indeed!—they really tell very well in Ireland; but in Paris that sort of dash-

ing effrontery is *du plus mauvais ton.* They used to call them the Irish giantesses, and *les Vénus Patagonesques!* I remember little Achille de Montmorency swearing that he climbed upon a chair to ask Dora O'Gorman to waltz; and that she replied in her Dublin French, '*Je le voudrois bien, Monsieur, mais papa croit que ce n'est pas propre;*' and Sophy, the youngest, asked one night, in my hearing, at a *soirée* at the Duchesse de Raguse's, whether the Prince de la Moskwa's father, Marshal Ney, was not shot, '*parcequ'il étoit un grand traiteur!*' Imagine the mystification of such a question!"

"Have you seen Mrs. Daly?"

"I caught a glimpse of her in a *ponceau* velvet hat and dress; looking like a *Feuergeist* in a German melodrama."

"And Mrs. O'Shaughnessy?"

"I have not been so fortunate as to encounter her. *Mais quant à celle-là, je la vois d'avance.* Every feature and every limb looks too large for the rest; yet I believe the symmetry of the unfortunate monster is unimpeachable. And then, *en fait de toilette,*—'tis such a bunch of bargains!—glittering with Birmingham chains,

and all the gilt bracelets of all the Bazaars;—with a flowing drapery of flimsy silk, just the texture for a *moscheto* curtain."

"True to the letter! for there she stands behind the dancers, beating false time to poor little Felicia Daly's *pas de Basques*."

"Miss Fleecy, as the people call her in the village, is really a pretty little doll; so very fair, and English, and shy; lisps like a bird, and sits upon one corner of her chair; and if you do but mention Harry Mitford's name, she tears her gloves to pieces with agitation."

"I sometimes think Florence is a little jealous of her old playfellow."

"And not without some reason. Madam Daly has been cunning enough to insinuate her daughter's sentimental partiality to the General; and as Felicia is of a good family, *de par son père*, and will inherit a good fortune from her godmama of the Youghal militia, our friend Bombardinian would very much prefer such a niece to Florence Dudley—with nothing to recommend her but an excellent disposition, and an elegant mind; a girl who, as a Parisian acquaintance of mine said of a portionless damsel,

'*est assez bien provisionnée quant au physique; —mais quant au moral—n'a pas le sou.*' "*

" And Mr. Mitford himself?"

" Is he blind—is he deaf—demented—ideotic? —If I thought him capable of balancing, think you I would have been at the trouble of bringing him here to-night?"

" Who is that saturnine sallow looking young man, standing by William Daly?—They appear friends, but do not interchange a syllable."

" That is the erudite heir of the O'Gormans, who always reminds me of the definition of Addison's appearance—' a silent parson in a tye wig.' Emilius O'Gorman is too wise to smile, and too learned to talk;—he only converses with the public typographically."

" An author already?—a poet or a novelist?"

" A novelist! hear it ye demons of the groaning press!—A poet! forbid it ye slaves of the lamp!—No, no!—that very black and solemn personage, has recently favoured the world with 'An inquiry into the modes of burial practised among the Coptic kings.' But his *capo d'opera* is ' A dissertation upon the analogical allegories

* Jouy.

to be traced in the Pantheon of the Runic mythology."

"Very well invented on your part.—I perceive that William Daly holds him in signal respect."

"William Daly addresses his adulation to every body who is anybody. He is the very thing for a diplomat;—a callow fledgeling of dissimulation and adroitness. He was a cunning child—a cunning boy—and will soon be a cunning man; and, like a parasite plant, raise himself by clinging to objects higher than himself. By the way, I hear that Lord Willersdale has already given him his first advance, by a confidential place in his secretary's office;—and I should really regret the creature's good fortune, were it not for the exultation of his excellent father, who is the best and most simple-hearted of men."

"My dear Helen!" interrupted Lord Willersdale, who had at length escaped from one of Lord Muntingford's longest electioneering stories, and torn away a button in extricating himself from prosy Sir William O'Gorman, "I fear I must now depart;—Vernon announced

my carriage an hour ago. God bless you, love! —take care of yourself; or rather let your brother take care of you. The sooner I see you in Hamilton Place, the better; unless at the risk of fatigue, and a hurried journey. Farewell! Lady Isabella; I am delighted to hear that yourself and Mr. Vyvyan have made arrangements to join Lady Willersdale's travelling party; *en attendant* pray do not detain her by your agreeable conversation from doing the necessary honours to her guests."

Helen felt conscious of having in some degree merited this rebuke; and after following Lord Willersdale into the Hall, for a final good bye, and hearing with undisguised triumph the loyal shouts and vehement acclamations with which, as he entered his travelling carriage, he was greeted by the multitude assembled in the court-yard, she returned into the ball-room; and so far constrained her natural timidity as to make the round of the saloon, and with Lady Theodosia's assistance, to enter into conversation with its various groups.

There was one person, however, among the crowd of the Willersdale saloon, who was less

complacently inclined to observe those clamorous evidences of the popularity of its noble owner.

"Only listen to those fools," whispered Mrs. Daly to her voluminous sister, the widow from Bath. "Hear them screeching out their hearts for Lord Willersdale's departure!—It was but the other day that they made a similar uproar in honour of his arrival. 'Mouth-honour, breath, which the poor heart would fain deny, but dare not,' as the poet sings. And after all, what will they gain by those yells?—their most mighty and puissant master, who is just as stern and as stately as one of the pine trees in the Willersville grove, and who does not know a Harry from Larry in any village throughout the estate—has got his head full of stars and garters, and all the humbuggery of humility with which men clutch at the prospect of a place, even while their wise heads are shaking a modest negative. He would let the Castle burn, and the tenantry drown, sooner than lose five minutes of the royal audience he is scampering after!—"

Mrs. Daly now fanned herself into an addi-

tional glow of indignation, for she was standing within sight of the happy faces of Mr. Mitford and Florence Dudley; and she found it difficult to forgive the latter that girlish simplicity of attire, which afforded so remarkable a contrast with the elaborate pink satin robe, and artificial roses, and countless decorations, she had inflicted upon her own daughter. Poor Mrs. O'Shaughnessy meanwhile who, exceeding her sister in personal vulgarity, amply redeemed the fault by one of the best natures in the world, and who found herself just then in especial good-humour with the whole human race, could not persuade herself to join in these strictures.

"Lord, sister, why not let the poor things hurra and shout? it keeps them warm this cold night, and doesn't hurt us. I love a row!—it puts me in mind of my old militia days, in poor dear O'Shaughnessy's time, when the lads were the better for their whisky punch. For my part, I could find it in my heart to give my lord three cheers myself, so handsomely as he has behaved to dear William; providing for him as if he were

his own, the first moment of his leaving college. I declare I feel as happy to night, as if *I* had got a place instead of Bill."

"And pretty slavery Mr. D. has had in earning Lord Willersdale's favour! What would the estate have been, and what would these shouting blockheads have been, if it had not been for D.? And I should like to know when they will make as much noise for *him*?"

"Now you know, sister, that not a tenant on the Willersville property, but loves the ground he walks on. And would you believe it, Lady W. comes up to me just now, and says she, 'Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, your niece dances charmingly; and I think I never saw a more brilliant complexion.' Lizzy and Livy Denny were listening with all their ears, and as spiteful as you please; so I made her a low curtsey, and told her how proud I was of her ladyship's good word, she being such a judge."

"I am sure you might have spared your thanks; Lady Willersdale is a very weak giddy young woman, and far from friendly or neighbourly with either me or Felicia; while there's that fantastical girl of Mr. Edwards's

singing and frisking away at the Castle all day long. I wish no harm may come of her visit to London in such gay company; but, thank God, William sees through her tricks at last; he has not spoken to her to night."

"But I really wish he would speak to somebody, or dance, or behave like other young men; for I heard that elegant comical little creature, Lady Bella Vyvyan, ask Sir William de Broke whether our William, and young O'Gorman, who were standing very black and silent on each side the gallery door, did not look like two mutes guarding the door of a funeral house; and then she begged the aid-de-camp would persuade them to ask 'Lizzy and Quizzy Denny' to dance."

"I suppose she calls that wit?"

"I don't know I'm sure; but they all laughed, and so did I."

Harry Mitford, who had detected Mrs. Daly's inquisitorial glances fixed most maliciously upon himself and his partner, now drew her to a sofa in one of the galleries under pretence of fatigue.

"I have a thousand things to say to you,

Florence, and no time to say them; for I must be off to Dublin to-morrow. In the first place, I like your Lady Willersdale very much; a graceful, elegant, unaffected woman, and young enough to feel herself your companion. Both Lord Willersdale and your two new friends have been more than kind to me about this ball; for I should not have dared make my appearance at the lodge after my uncle's prohibition."

"But surely, you need not return to Dublin yet awhile! In two days I accompany Lady Willersdale to England; the motive of your banishment will then be removed; and your return will afford so much comfort and happiness to Lady Theodosia!"

"And you are then really going to London? I heard the report from William Daly, and believed it to be one of his malicious fabrications."

"Why should you doubt it?"

"Because you never have asked *my* consent."

"I have obtained that of my guardian."

"But not that of your friend—of your lover—your old play-fellow—your future husband. No, no, Florence, do not shake your head; mine, and mine only shall you be, in

spite of all the uncles in the world. We shall have to wait, perhaps, for years; but what then? We will marry with gray heads, or upon crutches; and still be the happiest couple upon the earth."

"You speak boldly for *me*, Harry, as well as for yourself."

"I do—for you *are* myself. Ten years ago, you never used to deny that you loved me; and why should you now? Nor should I believe you if you did! I am so intensely persuaded of your fidelity and affection, that I do not even know what it is to be jealous. I see that Lord Barton is more than half in love with you already;—*peu m'importe!*—I know that William Daly is going to be almost an inmate in the same house with you; *ça m'est égal!*—that Captain Mordaunt, who by the way seems a fine frank manly fellow, will be the companion of your journey—*je lui en fais mon compliment!*—For in spite of the adoration of these, or twenty such, I have a perfect reliance upon your unchangeable truth to poor penniless Harry Mitford."

"You are right!" replied Florence, in a

faltering voice, as she turned her glowing countenance towards her lover. "How can I reward such generous trust with other than the most perfect affection?"

"If music be the food of love," exclaimed Lady Isabella, flying towards them, "you two may sit here and listen to the yeomanry band, while they batter down the overture to the Freischutz, with their kettle-drums and cymbals. *Mais moi par exemple, faute de sentiment, je suis affamée comme un loup.*"

"Is supper announced?"

"Have you not heard the spurs of his Majesty's gallant —th Hussars jingling for the first time this evening? What but Laurent's *fumet de gibier* can have set them in motion? *Allons donc!* I shall possess myself of Harry's idle arm by way of chaperon, and by way of pacifying Bombardinian. He has been hunting you out, Harry, this half hour, and I told him you were at the head of the supper-table with Dora O'Gorman. The wretch gave a very contented grunt; *et il est à parier*, that he is by this time two inches deep in a *dinde truffée*."

"How proud I ought to feel as the escort of two such——"

"Pho—child! do not throw away your exultation on my account. *Il n'y a pas ici une ame qui vaille la peine d'une*—flirtation!—thank heaven we have one Anglicism worth preserving. *Je ne m'occupe guères de la chasse aux souris —n'ayant pas le naturel félon.* And really there are none here to-night but such very 'small deer!'"

The banquet of the Willersdale ball was, as the newspapers express it, enriched with all the delicacies of the season; it was elegant, and abundant, and like other suppers, marvellously tedious towards the close. The chaperons—from the Episcopal matron, down to Mrs. Curate O'Donnelly, addressed themselves substantially to soup and Paté and other carnaceous varieties; while the young ladies profited by the gastronomic engrossment of their duennas, to listen to the soft nothings of their respective partners; sweeter, far sweeter than the *caramel* or *compôte* which sufficed to their own sentimental repast.

In due process of Champagne, the after-supper dances became extremely animated, and every body seemed to grow happier and more agreeable. Even the Hussars condescended, the white mice got partners; and the Miss O'Gormans, the Vyvyans, and the aid-de-camps, astonished the unsophisticated natives of Connaught with a genuine *galopade*. Mrs. Daly professed herself disgusted, for this saltatory innovation was not yet attainable in the course of Bath tuition; and she was only consoled by the sight of the young heir of Mitford Lodge, standing up beside her Felicia for the following quadrille. But Harry Mitford revenged himself on the General who had exacted this sacrifice at his hands, by whispering to Miss Dudley as they parted: "Mordaunt tells me, dearest Florence, that you will be in Dublin on Thursday. Remember—I shall accompany you to the Pigeon House for a last look."

CHAPTER II.

Hé bien?—quoi—qu'est ce—qu'y a-t-il?—Au diantre soient la sotte ville, et les sottes gens qui y sont! Ne pouvoir faire un pas sans trouver des nigauds!

Molière.

And when the little party landed at Holyhead, having made their steam passage under the double advantage of a hard frost and dead calm, that fond and confiding look was still deeply impressed upon the mind of Miss Dudley. Her departure from Willersdale had been embittered by the affecting and solemn benediction of her guardian, as well as by the tearful farewell of her friend, Lady Theodosia Mitford; and she had scarcely recovered the excitement of that trying moment, when the sight of the deep, deep sea, which was about to divide her from the lover of her youth—of her childhood—seemed for the first time to startle

her into a sense of the importance of the step she had undertaken. A strange country—a new nation—new friends—and unknown foes, were all before her! But it was now too late to recede; and although Captain Mordaunt's raillery failed to restore the smile to her pale cheeks, yet the affectionate pressure of Helen's friendly hand, in some measure served to reassure her. It was in vain that both continued to predict, during their first day's journey, that

> Friends in all the ag'd she'd meet,
> And lovers in the young.

She still remained thoughtful and absent; and when in the evening the Vyvyans joined their supper-party at Llangollen, Lady Isabella fairly chided her into tears for her ungracious dejection.

"My dear Lady Willersdale," exclaimed the giddy Parisian, as they were about to proceed on the following morning, "our travelling party will turn out villainously if we are to begin thus. *Soyons de notre pays!* It is the English custom for men and women to herd together each after their kind. Let Captain Mor-

daunt get into my carriage with Vyvyan and my imp; and *I* will come and enliven your feminine duo. They will amuse themselves with lying to each about woodcocks and *battues*, and boar hunts; and we will discuss our ball, and abuse our absent friends."

No possible objection could be made to this arrangement; and even Miss Dudley, who was in general more disgusted than diverted by Lady Isabella's sallies, felt too much obliged to her for her recent exertions in favour of Harry Mitford, to affect any coldness towards the sister of her dearest friend.

"Now is not this much better?" said Lady Isabella, as she muffled herself round in her furs in one corner of the carriage, and inserted her diminutive little feet under an opposite cushion. "I was horridly bored all yesterday. Vyvyan knows my *calembourgs* and *jeux de mots* too thoroughly by heart to give them a moment's attention; while I,—who have admired his pearly teeth these eight years past,—did not find the sight of them particularly recreating.

> Eternal smiles his emptiness betray,—
> As shallow streams run dimpling all the way."

"Oh! fie—Lady Isabella—this of your husband!"

"With what other person's could I take so great a liberty?—Of yours, *soit dit en passant*,—I am tremendously afraid; and after all, I am very glad I did not marry him myself."

"After all?—after what?"

"Has he never told you?—*honneur à sa loyauté!*—Oh! the *all* was very little, and still less to my credit. You are to know that I lived with the Mitfords for a year or two after my father's death; and as there was very little else to occupy my attention at the lodge, I amused myself there by falling desperately in love with——"

"Lord Willersdale!"

"*Au contraire!* with his castle and estates. They looked so desolately in want of a mistress! Besides I had it very seriously at heart, to torment and mortify Mrs. Daly.—So when I went to England, I persuaded my chaperon, old Lady Margaret Muntingford, who is a Galway woman, to invite Lord Willersdale to all her stupid boring dinners; and plague him with opera tickets; and recruit him in all our water

parties; that I might sigh at him, and to him, and for him! And so I did,—*mais en pure perte!* He had the sense to discover that I was a frivolous, interested little thing; and even had my *petit minois de fantaisie* tempted him to forget it, Ogress Danvers was always *aux écoutes*, and vigilantly on the alert against the manœuvres of aspiring young ladies, and crafty mammas. By the way, how did *you* manage to defeat her?"

"Did you not know," said Helen, humouring her folly, "that Willersdale married me one morning by mistake, in the country, and before Lady Danvers was aware of his plan?"

"*Ah! c'est différent!* Have you heard that old Danvers is likely to die?—He ate himself into a surfeit on arriving at Naples, with sour *ricotta*; and they say that the fair Honoria will bestow her hand and jointure on Clarence Wilmington, long within the discreet limits of a twelvemonth and a day."

"But will *he* accept the donation?—I should hardly think him a marrying man."

"Nor I.—He is one of the most agreeable persons in the world; but his *liaisons* are as am-

bitious as other men's marriages; the *bandeau* of his Cupid is always a coronet. In Paris, the Duchesse d' Ultramonte gave him the *sobriquet* of '*le Paladin des grandes dames!*' But all the time he is really in earnest; *et puisqu'il sait s'enthousiasmer à volonté, que ce soit Princesse ou bourgeoise,—que nous importe?* In short, I can forgive him every thing but liking Lady Danvers."

"You seem to have a *guignon* against my sister-in-law."

"And guess on whose account? Has Theodosia never given you a clue to the mystery?"

"I do not remember that she has ever mentioned Lady Danvers's name in my presence."

"Excellent creature! the most forbearing, the gentlest, yet proudest woman breathing. In the first place, her marriage with Mitford was that grossest of human errors called a love-match. He was a poor Captain of dragoons; but with some sort of staff-appointment in Dublin, they contrived to make it out; and were as truly attached and as happy as people can be in this buying and selling world of ours. Now Lady Danvers, who was amusing herself just

then by a scandalous flirtation with the Lord-Lieutenant, no sooner espied this loving couple in their little obscure Eden, than she took upon her the part of Satan;—and to spare poor Florence's blushes, who seems upon thorns—*elle s'est jetée à la tête de mon beau frère.* In a few months the handsome Mitford became her slave, and my poor dear exemplary Dosy a neglected and miserable, but unrepining wife."

"What cruel depravity!"

"Theodosia, meanwhile, attempted to console herself in the education of her lovely boy; on whom she doated with a more than common partiality. But there was another member of the family, who was less patient of Mitford's infamous folly."

"Yourself?"

"Oh! no;—I was a silly little unobservant child in those days. No!—Mitford was at that time considered the heir of an old maiden-aunt,—a certain Lady Gertrude Wentworth; who was so scandalized at the proceedings of her future representative, that she made interest to get him appointed deputy-governor of some capsicum-colony or other. Theodosia of course

accompanied him to the West Indies; and a few weeks after their arrival, her beautiful boy became a victim to the yellow fever. Yet I verily believe she never uttered a single murmur under this severe dispensation!"

"Just like her!" exclaimed Florence, with a quivering lip.

"It is a strange coincidence," said Lady Isabella, seriously; "but Florence Dudley is the living image of my poor little nephew. All that I can remember of Ferdinand is a brow like ivory, with jet-black eyes and hair exactly like her own. When she was younger, the resemblance was still more striking; and this, I imagine, was her original charm in the eyes of my sister."

"Whatever the cause, the effect has been a serious blessing to myself," said Miss Dudley fervently.

"You are a good child, and a grateful," replied Lady Isabella caressingly.

"And General Mitford?—was he much afflicted by this melancholy penalty of his folly?"

"As to Mitford,—I believe he is *brave comme son épée;* but he is just as hard, and just as cold. However, in this instance the retribution fell on tender ground; for Lady Gertrude, who adored the child, was so irritated by this extinction of the line, that she withdrew all her favour from its father to bestow it on another nephew,—almost as estimable,—Ferdinand Seymour of the Guards. To be sure *he* had no wife to outrage, or child to kill;—but I believe he has in *his* way, broken as many hearts as most men."

Lady Willersdale's colour mounted to her temples, but the attention of her companions was otherwise engrossed.

"I have promised Theodosia, to present Florence to old Lady Gertrude,—for we conclude she keeps up her ancient antipathy to the house of Willersdale; and as she is grand-aunt to Harry Mitford, it must be your business, Flo, to obtain the old lady's good graces. She may perhaps disinherit Seymour after all; and as I owe him a grudge or two, she has *my* consent to adopt Harry in his stead."

"Colonel Seymour was in office, I think, during the Delvile administration?" inquired Helen.

"Only for a month. *Il s'est approuvé trop volage pour le métier d'homme d'état;* having made old Delvile's wig stand on end, by sending in a hasty resignation, and flying to Paris after pretty little Lady Alberville. Many people thought it would be a match; but Lady Danvers, who was there on her road to Italy, drove Seymour wild by asserting that his new passion was only a feint, to cover his recent defeat in another quarter. They came to a war of words, and then to a paper war; which all but ended in a single combat between him and Wilmington. But conscious that the *beau monde* could not afford to lose either of them, they thought better of it. Clarence went on to Rome to take care of his poor old gouty friend Lord Danvers,—and Seymour was called back to England by the death of his uncle, Lord Forreston."

"I was not aware that he had already inherited that property."

"Several months ago; and my little friend,

Lady Alberville, has redoubled her *agaceries* to make him her own. But my dear Florence —why do you look so dolorous?—are you thinking of Harry Mitford's chances with Lady Gertrude—the stiff-necked;—or are you still harping upon that parting smile of his, which irradiated the whole quay when he whispered his few last words?

Felicité vaine!
Qu'on ne peut saisir,
Trop près de la peine
Pour être un plaisir!—

Poor Flo!"

"I suppose it will be useless to assure you that my thoughts were fixed upon Lady Theodosia;—upon her afflictions—her fortitude."

"I am glad we persuaded Barton to remain with her a few days longer; the Lodge would otherwise have seemed very solitary just now."

"I heard William Daly, whom Lord Barton has undertaken to bring over with him, assuring Lady Sophia Denny that they should not leave Ireland for ten days."

"And you had not the wit to discover that he was trying to shirk Lizzy and Quizzy's commissions! They had threatened him with 'a

very small packet or two for friends in London;' and the embryo Secretary of State was no doubt manœuvring that these might arrive at Willersdale the week after his departure."

Thus gossipped they—regardless of the time;

till on the afternoon of the second day of their journey, they found themselves upon that spirit-stirring threshold of London — the area fronting the Green Man at Barnet; a spot memorable for the smiles of the smirking Mr. Newman, and for the first scent of the widely-savouring atmosphere of the sooty metropolis. The carriage door having been opened during the change of horses, in spite of the cutting gales of a frosty evening, in order that Master Algernon might be rewarded for the fatigues of his journey by a languid kiss from his mamma, Captain Mordaunt's bronzed and good humoured face intruded itself, to inquire after his sister's bodily health, and Miss Dudley's mental composure.

"What an agitating moment for your feelings! Does not the first glance of yonder murky haze, springing from the distant spot,

Where reeking London's smoky cauldron simmers,

fill you with delicious anticipations? Do you not already behold visions of Almack's, and the glories thereof?"

"My very dear Sir!—'prythee, beat thy drum, and get thee gone,'" exclaimed Lady Isabella, interrupting Miss Dudley's sober reply, "I have swallowed a catarrh's worth of cold air during that last prosaic sentence."

The door was instantly closed;—Newman's raised hat, and classical "all paid boys!" sped them on their way; and Lady Isabella, wrapping her Boa more closely round her chin, reinsconced herself in her former snuggery.

"You should not let your brother grow tiresome, my dear Lady Willersdale; for if he were not a bore, he might be very useful to you, and save you from the perils and dangers of a *cavaliere servente*."

"Bore as you may find him, he has good-naturedly promised me his services exactly in the way you mention; and as he abhors the routine of London society, I conclude I may attribute his sudden reformation to the attractions of my new companion."

" A year or two hence, you will have formed William Daly into a very tolerable fetcher and caller of shawls and carriages,—one of the chief duties of his secretariat; but at present you are not sufficiently established yourself to introduce a *new man*. That boy, however, was too long under the tuition of his Jesuit kinsman, Father O'Daly, to be trusted as an *ami de la maison*."

" You are yourself, in this respect particularly fortunate. Mr. Vyvyan's tastes and age assimilate so well with your own, and he is besides so thoroughly an idle man, that you are always sure of his protection in society; an advantage which few wives can appreciate, but those who have been deprived of its benefits."

" Why, yes! Vyvyan is certainly as vain and as fond of dissipation as myself; and we have learned our lesson in Paris, *où il est du bon ton de se faire conduire pars on mari;* while in London,—moral—canting—persecuting—prosecuting London,—the head quarters of domestic virtue, and of conjugal happiness—the married men of fashionable life are to be seen with

every body's wives but their own. The fact is, that the English consider their moral reputation as a sort of accredited national fund, which enables them to defy appearances, and outrage *les bienséances* on all possible occasions."

"Being well aware," interrupted Miss Dudley, eager in defence of her countrywomen, "that the grossest demoralization is that which screens itself under the most specious mask."

"*Paix donc! petite impertinente!* — what should you know about men and women?—But *you*, Lady Willersdale, you who *do* already know from experience the habits of London, and from intimate report, those of Paris, and other continental cities, can you deny that the extent of its area and population forms one of the securest pledges for its domestic virtues? In London, where the houses have street doors, and where you change horses in the course of a morning visit, you do not see the same people often enough to learn to like them too well; while in other capitals, whose limited circles afford but the materials for a single coterie — for nightly re-unions—there are only too many op-

portunities to favour the progress of the *liaisons* instigated by idleness and luxury."

"What an able apology for foreign vice!"

"Truth, my dear Flo, a melancholy truth! —Witness the superior excellence of the matrons of the secondary class of English society; who visit in seven-league chariots from Westminster to Bloomsbury—from the ultima Thule verging on the New Road, to the woodland shades of Brompton; and bestow their cold insipidity on each several and various assemblage of Browns and Smiths, only once in the three hundred and sixty-five nights of their diffusive dissipation. While your *beau monde*, whose etherial particles re-unite at least three nights in the week throughout the season, more than rivals that of Paris in ——"

"Hush! hush! hush!—you are not an impartial judge of London. Recollect too, how many seasons have elapsed since you passed one here."

"The fair fame of your Lady Danverses and Duchesses of Delvile does not fail to travel by the packet-boat. I am sadly afraid, too, that the experience of a single spring will not

avail to improve my information respecting the manners of the day; for I find people can only speak to each other, and appear in an acknowledged way in public, between the 20th of May and the 20th of July; and that out of every ball of tolerable pretensions, three hours are passed in the hall, and on the stairs.

"We have thus four months of *incognito* before us."

"Do not allude to our prospects! I, who am going to be entombed in Hanover Square with old Sir Simon Vyvyan and his gout, cannot think of them without a shudder. What shall we have to enliven us during the next hundred and twenty-one days? — A meagre opera, filled up with *remplaçants* and *doubles sur la scène*, and with great coats in the pit!— an occasional 'dance'—(how I hate a *dance!*) at some Dowager's overburthened with daughters; —and an indifferent dinner at Sir George W.'s, hazarded while his *chef* is over at Paris, making his provision of *olives truffées* for the season, and learning the last new disguise for a chicken! Then the carnival detains your orchestras till after Easter; and you are compelled to waltz

to the squeaking of indigenous violins; whose music, fortunately for your ears, is drowned in that universal cough, which distracts the lungs of Great Britain between the fog-days and the dog-days. I am assured that you never bring forward an important political question in the House, or a new opera, during the prevalence of the east winds, for fear they should be barked down."

"*Messer Ludovico! dove avete mai pigliato tante coglionerie?*" quoted Florence Dudley, with an arch smile.

"From the well in which truth has been bucketed, ever since the fall of man;—from the European echoes of the thousand tongues of rumour."

"Or of slander—of *scandal!*"

"*Excusez! ma mignonne.* Scandal is an English key superadded to the trumpet of fame. In Paris we not only despise and mistrust the *mauvaise foi* with which English sinners keep their heads above water by peeping over the shoulders of the fallen, but acknowledge proverbially that '*Qui éclabousse sa voisine, fait soupçonner qu'elle s'est déjà crottée.*" But look, Florence, look! yonder is the misty out-

line of St. Paul's!" and Lady Isabella kissed her hand towards the first prospect of the metropolis.

"We are told," said Florence, "that the Italian postilions uncover their heads in pointing out to travellers the mighty dome of the eternal city."

"Why have you conjured up the spectre of Rome, to distract poor Lady Isabella by the force of contrast?" said Helen, laughing at the mock heroic air with which her ladyship's hands were now clasped together.

"Florence! my dear unsuspecting child!" said Lady Isabella, with affected earnestness, "we are now—at the distance of five miles and some poles or perches—arrived at the extremity of one of those straggling, crablike claws, with which London fixes its brick-and-mortar grasp upon the country!—Instead of the corn fields and vineyards which spread their salubrious vacuum under the walls of Paris or Vienna, behold the Prospect Places, and Pleasant Rows, whose pert frontage excludes all suspicion of green fields from the suburban walks of our citizens. Instead of the merry *guinguettes*,

with their announcements of '*Ici on fait nôces et festins*,' or '*Salon a* 100 *couverts*,' behold the assurance of 'droves taken in,' and 'table beer,' in all its varieties of *ex*-cellence;—or a general invitation to 'use Turner's Blacking,' as if we were a nation of *décrotteurs*. Instead of

Reeling with grapes, red waggons in the way,

behold drays, and dust carts, and anti-phil-animalite two-horse coaches!"

"I hear the sound of merry voices from some vehicle that precedes the carriage," said Lady Willersdale.

"Then it is doubtless the jovial crew of a return-hearse," said Lady Isabella. "*Les enterremens, ce sont les fêtes de l'Angleterre! Hélas nous voici a la barrière!* When shall we three meet again!"

"In a day or two—to-morrow if you are kind," replied Helen.

"My dear Lady Willersdale! I was only contemplating the case in a moral point of view. At our next meeting, betide when it may, we shall not be ourselves;—we shall be playing our London parts;—lying to each other in word and deed;—assuming all sorts of fine and fas-

tidious airs. 'Tis our vocation, Hal! and heaven send us a better. *En attendant*—good bye to you both; for I perceive the carriages are pausing for a change of passengers."

Saluting them both *a la Françoise*, Lady Isabella disappeared; and while her gallant successor exerted himself to render the remainder of the road agreeable to Miss Dudley, his sister relapsed into silence, absorbed in her own reflexions.

These, however, were of an exclusively gratifying character; for she amused herself with contrasting her present, with her *first* arrival in Hamilton Place. In spite of the reputed happiness of honeymoons, it is certain that the wife if "dearer than the bride," is also far more to be envied. Lady Willersdale, on the former occasion, was going to her "new house;" but she now felt herself to be going—*home!* She was now assured of her own feelings, of Lord Willersdale's confidence, and was consequently at her ease; and when at length she reached her own familiar door, she desired Vernon to marshal Miss Dudley and Captain Mordaunt to the drawing room, and flew with privileged

intrusion into the study of her husband, receiving his affectionate kiss of greeting, almost with tears.

In return for the little she had to communicate, Lady Willersdale had much to learn. Intelligence of the death of Lord Danvers had been received in London on the preceding day; and although the new Premier affected no vehement sympathy in the sufferings of his late brother-in-law, yet the position of his sister,—who after all her arts and all her scheming, had never contrived to augment her original jointure of fifteen hundred a-year, or the scanty portions of her four daughters, and who now found herself dependent on the caprice of a dissolute and unmanageable son—seemed to balance the triumph of his recent appointment.

"He could not succeed in persuading Helen to regard the flattering manner in which that appointment had been conferred upon him, as any thing more than an equitable repayment of his former services. Having gravely rebuked her partiality in his cause, he accompanied her to offer a cordial welcome to his new guests;

whom he found established in friendly intimacy in Helen's boudoir; beside a table most promisingly covered with new books,—new music,—new caricatures,—new reviews;—and an abundant shower of visiting cards, and *billets* of inquiry.

CHAPTER III.

In the great world, which, being interpreted,
Meaneth the West or worst end of a city,
And about twice two thousand people, bred
By no means to be very wise or witty;
But to sit up while others lie in bed,
And look down on the universe with pity,
Helen, as an inveterate Patrician,
Was well received by persons of condition.

Byron.

LETTER FROM LADY MORDAUNT TO LADY WILLERSDALE.

"Receive, my dearest child, the congratulations of your father and myself upon the recall of Lord Willersdale! The whole nation seems to exult in the certainty that justice has at length been rendered to one of the noblest ornaments of our time and country; but I trust that my fond maternal solicitudes may cause this

letter to be the first written expression of the general sympathy which reaches your hands.

"Your immediate return to London is the chief advantage we derive from this gratifying event; and when I reflect, my dear Helen, that seven dreary months have now divided us from our beloved child, I can scarcely repress my impatience to fly to Hamilton Place, and fold her once more in my arms. My prospects, indeed, for the ensuing spring are truly delightful, as it is my intention to pass a considerable time in town; and I am enabled to gratify my earnest desire of living among my children without entailing any additional expense upon your father. Poor Jane, whose situation renders her at present extremely nervous, cannot bear to be left alone during those long dreary mornings which her husband is obliged to pass in the city; and the Forsyth family, well aware of her helplessness and weak spirits, have persuaded me to oblige them *all*, by accepting the use of a spare room in her house. It is therefore probable, my dear, that I shall see a great deal of you during the season; and I trust I may without partiality, be permitted to acknowledge, that I

anticipate more happiness from yours and dear Jane's society, than that of any other of my children.

"As to poor Lady Gray, she is so encumbered by her enormous family, that it really distracts one to pass a day in her house. Such squabbling among the nurses, such squalling for falls and bruises, and such an unceasing dread of colds, or measles, or a new tooth, that one never has a moment's rest. And then, *entre nous*, they are getting terribly embarrassed by the expenses consequent upon such an increasing household; Sir Herbert, I find, is very tenacious with your father about the exact payment of Sophia's allowance; and this vexes Sir Stephen. Gray is really a good sort of man—but what does that signify with a large family, and only four thousand a-year!

"I conclude you are aware of poor Sir Robert Lilfield's indisposition. He is still at Beech Park; but they talk of coming to town immediately, because Anna Maria insists pon his trying the medicated-aërated-hydro-iodinious baths, lately brought into fashion by Dr. Phlogiston. Being well aware of my

daughter Lilfield's obstinacy, whenever she takes any whim of this sort into her head, I make it a point to say nothing on the subject; to *you*, however, I may confidentially observe, that since his last attack Sir Robert's left eye has been in perpetual blink; that there is a very odd screw about his mouth, and that he is always confounding the names of people and places. These are very awkward symptoms; and if Phlogiston really considers them nervous, I have no great opinion of his sagacity; but we must make it a point to keep our suspicions to ourselves, on account of poor Sir Robert's constituents. All this makes Anna Maria very anxious and fidgety; for Beech Park, you know, is entailed upon her eldest boy; and between ourselves, her large unhealthy family would be a great charge to so young a widow. I should certainly recommend her to marry again under such circumstances; however, Lilfield, even if paralytic, may survive for many years. And it will be all the better for her!

"I have already acquainted you with William's marriage to his cousin Caroline. I always hoped that old engagement would come to

nothing; for his living is a bare five hundred a year. But they fancy themselves in love; and that goes a great way at their age. Of Jack, and his movements, you know more than I do; for he never shows us the respect of writing; and as to your eldest brother, he shuts himself up in his Albany chambers, and no one ever hears a word about him. He says he is *improving* himself; for my part I wish he would terminate his education, and show us the fruits of it; but he has not yet opened his lips in the House, and I should not be much surprised if he were writing a book, or some such foolish thing! He had much better look about him, and marry an heiress, for I can tell him his father will pay no more election bills for him one while.

"God bless you, my dearest Helen; that we may shortly meet, is the earnest prayer of

"Your affectionate Mother,

"M. A. MORDAUNT."

While Lady Willersdale was occupied in the perusal of this delicate maternal effusion, a few days after her arrival in town, Florence Dudley had posted herself at the drawing-room

window overlooking the Park; secretly marvelling at the widely-spreading reputation of that noted resort of the gay and the fashionable.

The aspect of its winter soil—a *pasticcio* of mud and soot, scantily tufted with sickly pasture, and diversified by a few stunted trees dimly seen through the haze of a misty rain;—the character of its occasional passengers, consisting of gaitered drawing-masters, plodding under cotton umbrellas towards the Kensington academies, and of grooms in fustian suits, exercising their masters' horses, or returning from an inspection-visit to Tattersall's,—struck her as a melancholy contrast with the sparkling waters of the Shannon, and the crowning groves of the Mitford Lodge plantations. On the opposite side of the house, the prospect was still more dispiriting;—a row of brick houses with closed shutters, and no visible inhabitant except a hobbling porter in a welch wig. The news of Lord Danvers's death having detained Lady Willersdale at home during the manufacture of her mourning, they had yet received no visitors except poor little moping Mrs. Montagu Forsyth; who assured her sister that she

had no earthly comfort but her carpet-work during the absence of her mamma; and that a long tedious winter in town had often made her long for the noisy cheerful school-room at Mordaunt Park. Helen could not forbear smiling; for she remembered a crisis of her own married life which had taught even herself to regret the monotonous seclusion of her former home; but it certainly had not arisen from the same mental poverty that rendered poor Jane a burden to herself, and all around her.

But the dispiriting impressions received by Miss Dudley during the early days of her residence in Hamilton Place, were not destined to endure. Previous to Helen's arrival in town, Lord Willersdale had secured for her use the Opera box hitherto occupied by his sister, as well as the alternate weeks of a private box at Covent Garden; and he had already regulated his establishment upon a scale of liberal hospitality for the coming season. Every Saturday was to be devoted to political dinners; from which a supper-party after the opera, was to form Lady Willersdale's compensation for her exclusion. He also requested that she would select

some other day for weekly dinners of general invitation; and that, as his present mansion was not calculated for balls of the extent and splendour becoming his situation, she would entertain her friends, and gratify her own and Miss Dudley's taste, with musical coteries as frequently as she pleased.

No sooner, therefore, did the arrival of two dresses of sable velvet entitle Lady Willersdale and her young friend to appear in public, than the ears of Florence were gratified with the long coveted indulgence of an Italian Opera. Scarcely had they reached their box under the escort of Captain Mordaunt, when the buzz of admiration greeting their *entrée*, assured the unsuspecting Helen that her anticipations touching the effect to be excited by Miss Dudley's beauty were fully justified. She was little aware how much more powerful was the general influence of her own tranquil elegance and matron loveliness; and even when she found herself surrounded by the gratulations and eager greeting of her numerous acquaintance of the preceding season, she still continued to attribute their *empressement* to Lord Willers-

dale's popularity, increased by the remembered interest of his duel, as well as by the honours of his recent appointment to the Premiership. Captain Mordaunt was at once surprised, and gratified, and alarmed, by observing his beautiful sister to be thus unconsciously the object of general attention; while Helen, aware of his emotion, naturally attributed it to jealousy of Florence, who was confessedly becoming every day more attractive and more interesting to his feelings.

But she was not long permitted to remain in doubt as to the degree of interest excited by her return to the fashionable world. On the following day Lady Isabella Vyvyan flew into her boudoir; and snatching the pen from her hands with which she was inditing a letter of ceremony to Lady Mordaunt, established herself for a *causerie.*

"And so you were both at the Opera last night, and in the altissimo of your charms."

"Were you there?"

"Oh no! I was listening to Sir Simon's nine hundred and ninety-ninth description of his first appearance at Almack's, with pinked heels

and a hat and feather,—on his return from the grand tour. But little Amédée de la Vauguyon, one of the French secretaries, has been with me this morning rhapsodizing about "cette Leddi Villairsdel," and her exquisitely beautiful sister;—and he assures me he never beheld any thing like the enthusiasm with which your appearance was hailed among the men. '*Vous aviez le secret*,' he said, "*d'animer la masse marmoresque d'une nation d'insensibles.*'"

"And what has originated the idea that Florence is a sister of mine? *My* younger sister has red hair."

"If it were blue *ce seroit égal.* Not having been out in London previous to your marriage, no one has been at the trouble of remembering your name; and as Miss Dudley's is printed on your cards, and her person seen in mourning by your side at the opera, the world decides you to be sisters. *Soit!*—the *equivoque* will be peculiarly advantageous to her."

"And will save *me* a world of explanations."

"Did you see Lord Forreston last night?"

"Is he in town so early?"

"Oh! these great political questions have

brought up even the foxhunters this year. He was opposite to you last night in Lady Alberville's box."

"I certainly did perceive a *lorgnette* devoutly fixed upon Florence from that quarter."

"I rather suspect it was on yourself; for I have had one of Lady Alberville's finessing little billets this morning, imploring me to contrive an acquaintance between you; and promising to secure me two subscriptions for Almack's, if I will persuade you to make one of her *petit comité*. Now, as we all know that the Alberville's device is *diviser pour règner*, I doubt not, that she regards you as a magnet likely to secure Lord Forreston's attendance."

"And what have you promised and vowed in my name?"

"Nothing; for saving the pleasure of meeting you there, I am perfectly indifferent on the subject. Almack's I am already sure of; and I have so utter an abhorrence of *manigances* of every description, that Lady Alberville's offered bribe rather inclines me to defeat her project. Why could not she say to me, like a woman of spirit, 'I want to know Lady Wil-

lersdale; she is the fashion,—and pretty and agreeable; and so am I.—Pray make us acquainted.'"

"You need not disappoint her on this occasion; for it will suit me very well to indulge her whim. Not however that I may meet you, dear Lady Isabella, at her *soirées;* for I trust we shall be very often together without any such *rendezvous.* You must dine with me as often as you can leave Sir Simon; and I trust you will sometimes accompany us to the opera."

"*Jamais!—ma toute aimable; jamais! quoique j'en raffole.*

Have I no friends to shame, no soul to save,

That you imagine me capable of inserting that barbarous prodigy, a *third* woman, into your box? Still less would I disgrace myself by banishing poor Flo,—to whom the opera is an equal pleasure and advantage,—even for a single night. However, since you are inclined to be goodnatured—pray send Vyvyan one of your spare tickets occasionally, for he doats on Pasta; and I can be his substitute at piquet with his respected parent during his absence.

To say the truth,—which is a truth you have, I conclude, already guessed,—we have chained ourselves to Sir Simon's gouty chair only by way of escaping *Saint Pélagie*, and persuading *le cher papa* to pay our debts. Now he would be scarcely more horrified at seeing us throw away money on opera-tickets, than by the certainty that a small piece of ivory, worth eight substantial shillings, and six beggarly pennies, was lying uselessly idle upon Vyvyan's dressing table.—Why do you smile?"

"At my own discovery of the interest you take in your husband's amusements;—*you* who sometimes talk of him and to him in so very graceless a strain."

"You are surprised that I am not unintermittingly selfish? You are almost as provoking as a certain set in Paris, who insist upon it that I resemble your odious Lady Danvers; simply because we have both a genius for saying impertinent things. Yet I cannot accuse *myself* of having done wilful injury to breathing man or woman, or Honoria of having left *undone* any within the scope of her powers."

"Too true!" said Helen mournfully; "as *I* can, from fatal experience, attest."

"You have heard of her *triste avanture?*"

"Witness my broad hems and black dress."

"*Quelle naïveté!* No—no!—not Lord Danvers's death!—I allude to Wilmington's desertion."

Lady Willersdale could not repress an inquiring look.

"Vyvyan had a letter yesterday from his cousin Henry Melbourne,—who is attached to the Neapolitan mission,—asserting that on the day of old Danvers's funeral, Clarence, after a respectful attendance upon the remains of his departed friend, set off for Florence."

"I dare say with a mutual good understanding."

"By no means; or the dame of Ephesus would not have discovered herself to be *toute eplorée.* Melbourne declares that *l'infidèle* wrote her a very ceremonious letter of adieu, assuring her that his reputation rendered him a very dangerous acquaintance for any other than *married* women; *et qu'il s'en tenoit là, jusques aux secondes nôces de Miladi!* But this *persi-*

flage does not pass with me !—I know Clarence Wilmington *à fin fond;* and I am persuaded he is both too good natured and too gentlemanly to insult a woman, even while he despised her. —I read the matter in a very different interpretation. Till this Italian journey he had seen Honoria only in the glare of society, charming and being charmed; successful, and gentle, and condescending; and he admired her accordingly. But as a harsh and bad mother to four innocent girls,—as the prompter and abetter of premature corruption in her son,—as a wife and as a woman, false and fierce and mischievous, she appeared *to him* under the ordeal of daily intimacy the very fiend she is; and he has wisely profited by the first occasion to break the bonds of his slavery."

" *Elle est punie par où elle a péchée!* Yet, as Willersdale's sister, I sometimes indulge a hope of her reformation."

" At Naples she has been doomed to a thousand mortifications. Her eldest daughter has attached herself to some younger brother who defies Lady Danvers and her prohibitions;—the young Lord has had an immense fine to

pay to Barbaja, for carrying off one of the St. Carlos figurantes; —and *de pire en pire*, Snakerly the caricaturist, whom she had affronted in the pride of her prosperity, has revenged himself by circulating a little series of caricatures of the bitter Honoria, as the "Grandmother of the Graces,—Love in Wrinkles,—*Tyran le blanc*, &c. &c. &c. By the way—all this scandal unreproved, reminds me of Flo's absence. Where is she?"

"William Daly arrived this morning with a whole packet of letters; and she has been shut up reading them in her room since breakfast."

"Poor girl!—I can understand it all;—for Barton has also brought me a quire of lamentations from Theodosia. It seems that a serious explanation has taken place between Harry and his uncle on the subject of his attachment; and that the General has confided to him the extent of his own embarrassments, which are far more extensive than his wife and nephew have hitherto conjectured. Now as many or most of these were incurred as security for Harry's silly, dissipated father, it becomes quite impossible for him to encumber the General further

by an early marriage with a portionless wife. Even Dosy acknowledges the case to be hopeless; and implores me not to allow her dear girl to blight her own future prospects, by adhering to an attachment and an engagement which Harry has himself consented to resign."

"I do not quite forgive him for that."

"He sacrifices his own feelings to a sense of duty; he has even explained his position to Mr. Edwards, who respects his resolution, and has written to Florence to recommend a similar course of resignation. For my own part, I have still a vague presentiment about Lady Gertrude Wentworth. Persuade Flo to accompany me,—and I will call upon her to-morrow."

"Better wait till next week, when her feelings will be more tranquillized."

"Not a word more at present. Here is Captain Mordaunt; and I suspect he is not wholly uninterested in the subject."

But whatever might be the secret perturbations of Miss Dudley's feelings under a trial so grievous and so perplexing, there was not the slightest trace of agitation to be discerned in the composure of her ordinary address and gentle

courtesy. She appeared to have taken her resolution without hesitation and without pain; but however it had been framed, she extended not the secret to Lady Willersdale; who, on her own part, was too delicate and too considerate to intrude uninvited upon her confidence. Sometimes, indeed, when Helen, moved by the sympathy of a generous heart, was tempted to display towards her young friend a more than ordinary measure of attention and affection; or when Lord Willersdale, in his desire to divert her attention from herself, urged them to some new project of amusement, Florence,—as if jealous of their suspicions,—would rouse herself to an unnatural degree of vivacity, and affect a lively interest in the flatteries of the numerous young men of fashion forming part of their habitual *coterie*.

Of these,—pre-eminent in the little group,—was a pair of friends who appeared to have been attracted towards each other by the force of contrast. Lord Bernard Neville was at the head of the *pococurante* school of modern fashion. He was handsome and well-bred, and had proved himself, in his university ordeal, to

be gifted with very superior powers; but, from the moment of his enrolment in the mighty corps of idlers about town, he had contrived to lull them into the most profound lethargy. He affected indeed, or felt no contempt for the pleasures or pursuits of society; but he performed his listless part in the drama with the immobility of a statue;—apparently absent in mind, and very visibly languid in action, it was difficult to conjecture by what mechanical process he managed to progress from place to place without any undue exertion of volition. *Il sembloit errer ça et là, sans guide ni compas.* Yet he somehow or other anchored himself exactly where he was wanted, or wished to be; while a vacant smile alone expressed his consciousness of the change. It seemed as though his body were wandering about in pursuit of his mind; his replies were always vague,—and his questions as little adapted to time or place, as if they had arrived per post from Timbuctoo.

His friend, Lord Mellerton, meanwhile, appeared to have feloniously possessed himself of the lost sensibilities and abandoned animation of the apathetic Neville. *Brusque*, to a fault,—

either from pride or shyness,—among strangers, he repaid himself by the most winning and cordial frankness of address towards the softer sex. Among women he was an universal favourite; though many reproved him as too careless of *les usages*, and all acknowledged him to be wild as an unreclaimed hawk. It was difficult indeed to determine whether it were his own impulsion or that of his impassive friend, which now led them so frequently to the door of Lady Willersdale's box,—to the door of Lord Willersdale's house. When Mellerton publicly accused Lord Bernard of a predilection for the beautiful wife of the new Premier, he languidly pressed his arm with an unconscious stare, and answered, "that the question was carried by an immense majority;" and when Neville assured Lady Alberville, in presence of his Pylades, that poor Mellerton was desperately in love with Lady Willersdale's beautiful friend, the defendant laughed the charge to scorn with an indignant elevation of his long chin, and a thousand inimitable contorsions of his elegant person.

Mr. Brill, meanwhile, who was as adhesive

to office as the ponderous inkstand upon its well-worn desk, and whose intimate version in the etiquette and routine of business rendered him an instrument indispensable to the hands of the successive rulers of the state, had contrived to fasten his hold upon the new minister, and to sanction his intrusion into the domestic circle of the unresisting Helen. William Daly too, was necessarily admitted within the same line of demarcation; and although Lord Mellerton had inquired whether His Solemnity were stuffed, or only a layman borrowed from the Royal Academy, yet the sapient air and handsome person of the young secretary, had already obtained him a gracious reception in that fashionable society of which the Willersdales formed the presiding deities.

But neither these, nor twenty more who were in the habit of devoting their nightly attentions to the lovely Lady Willersdale and her young companion, could obtain by the choicest airs of their exclusivism, or by the most flattering homage of their flippant flatteries, one genuine smile of interest from Florence Dudley. Without any unbecoming disregard to the value of

conventional rank, she felt an innate superiority to its unsupported claims; she had lived too long secluded from the power of observation of its influence upon society, to learn at once the vulgar lesson of mean adulation. The philosophic precepts of her guardian had taught her to regard the existing race of men as but an insignificant link between the multitudes of past ages, and the unimaginable myriads of posterity; —to respect those who by eminence of virtue, or of talent, had attained the distinction of individual fame;—and to love those only, who, by the subordinate exercise of the domestic virtues,—softened by kindliness and the desire of pleasing,—addressed themselves more immediately to her regard and attention. But Mr. Edwards had never been an inhabitant of cities; he had never learned the importance of a claim on the pageant of coronations; or of those escutchoned rights which emblazon the funerals of ennobled obscurity. In his ignorance, he had omitted to impart to his pupil a due deference towards the narrow and trifling opinions of any ideot, chance-graced by a coronet; or a fitting sense of the factitious importance of the vulgar, the ungene-

rous, and the unprincipled,—whose names have been chronicled in the eyes of the nation from the reign of the Norman conqueror, to that of the adopted Hanoverian dynasty.

It was therefore no common-place deference towards his rank in the aristocracy, or to his rank in the still more supreme *noblesse* of fashion, which attracted Miss Dudley's interest and admiration towards Lord Forreston on their first introduction. She could scarcely herself explain by what art or fascination he had acquired a superiority in her eyes; but she was fully conscious that from the earliest moment of their acquaintance, she had felt more inclined to converse with him, and more flattered by his attentions to herself, than by those of any other member of their society.

For some weeks after the re-appearance of Lady Willersdale in the universal haunts of the *beau monde*, Lord Forreston and herself had met daily, and nightly, and almost hourly, without any further attempt at the renewal of their former intimacy than a very distant bow. On Lord Forreston's part, this cold recognition was wholly free from embarrassment—from re-

sentment, or from the shadow of a painful reminiscence of any kind. He appeared totally forgetful of the peculiar circumstances of their parting; and so powerful are the Lethean properties of the whirlpool of fashionable life, that Helen sometimes persuaded herself to believe that the elegant Forreston—a libertine of twenty years' experience,—*had* actually forgotten his former designs upon herself." *Tant mieux!*" she repeated to herself. "I, who am fortunately less oblivious, remain resolutely on my guard; and am spared the loss of an agreeable acquaintance, and the annoyance of feeling myself obliged to keep up a show of prudish resentment for a momentary folly—whose presumption my ignorance of the world probably induced me to over-rate."

Garde à vous, belle Helène!—garde à vous! —by wilful blindness, by levity such as this, full many an innocent female heart has passed unconsciously through its earliest stages of corruption!

Lord Forreston, however, appeared in no haste to put her feelings to the proof; he affected total indifference and total unconsciousness; stood by her side with Lady Alberville

upon his arm without an attempt at conversation; nor ever departed from the originally chilling deference of his passing bow to the new queen of fashion, whose throne was already thronged by the worship of its courtiers.

But Forreston had now acquired the right of regarding himself superior to this paltry crowd; —he was himself a deity, enshrined and adored; —an idol of supreme *bon ton!*—Like other false gods, his chief attribute was a careful seclusion of himself and his altars from the gaze of the multitude. He was never to be seen in public places; at the opera he contrived to ensconce himself in the most obscure sanctuary of some recondite box; and if his cabriolet were accidentally detected scudding mysteriously through the incognito of Park Lane, it was of so dark a dye, its harness so plain, its attendant so scrupulously unliveried, that the boldest witness would have been puzzled to swear to its owner's identity. He was guiltless of Almack's, and of balls in all their varieties; accepted no formal invitations to large dinner parties, and avoided the acquaintance of all

crowd people. *Par conséquent* there was not a *boudoir comité*,—a *petit souper* arrangement,—a superlatively select dinner of the *élite*, a thrice exquisitely refined *soirée* at D. House,—in which he was not naturally included. "If we can *get* Forreston!" was a presumptive preliminary among all the fine ladies, and "I shall fix on nothing till I find when Forreston will be disengaged," was the humble confession of many an *Altesse* who had declined the acquaintance of half the British peerage.

Lord Forreston himself meanwhile, appeared totally insensible to the vast extent of his popularity, totally indifferent to the omniscience of his personal influence. Studiously plain in his dress, and unassuming in his *maintien*, his sole display of power consisted in a conscious superiority to the tinsel of external attractions, to the parade of wealth and elegance, by which even the noblest of his peers affect to dazzle the public eye. In society his address was calm and simple, his voice low, his tone of conversation easy and unassuming; and if at times he suffered a word of bitterness from his lips to

affix the ban of the empire of fashion on some offending victim—there was neither appeal nor escape from so mighty a sentence of reprobation. That, and those whom *he* permitted himself to condemn, were lost indeed!

CHAPTER IV.

J'aime qu' avec douceur nous nous montrions sages,
Et ne suis point du tout pour ces prudes sauvages
Dont l'honneur est armé de griffes et de dents,
Et veut, au moindre mot décourager les gens.
Me préserve le ciel d'une telle sagesse!
Je veux une vertu qui ne soit point diablesse.

Le Tartuffe.

Is it to be supposed that Lady Willersdale, followed and flattered by all the rest of London —lovely and *désœuvrée*—and in her twentieth year,—could remain insensible to the callous neglect of such a personage. Could any woman of less than Roman fortitude—of less than sterling virtuous principle—have reconciled herself to such contumelious indifference?

Admitted through the claims of her unequalled beauty and triumphant position in the world, into those very coteries of which Lord Forreston

was the supreme dictator, she could not blind herself to his studied avoidance; an avoidance which surprised her the more, as from the first night of Florence Dudley's appearance in the London world, she had attracted and retained his undisguised admiration. Nay, it was upon his peremptory verdict that she had first obtained those honours of fashion now generally conceded as her due. At a select dinner party, at L. House, Miss Dudley's beauty and accomplishments had become the topic of discussion in his presence.

"She is certainly handsome," said Lord Mellerton, "but very heavy and cold;—not to be compared with the *air d'enjouement* of Lady Emily C—, Mrs. S—'s girlish loveliness, or Lady A. B—'s varying powers of conversation."

"Absurd! to compare *her* manner or tone with those of women of *real* fashion," exclaimed Mr. Brill, who like other nobodies was wondrously curious in the genealogies of other people. "I find she is only the daughter of an Irish curate in the neighbourhood of Willersdale Castle."

"Were she the daughter of an Irish sexton,"

observed Lord Forreston in his usual low but decided tone, " she would not be the less elegant, the less refined, the less beautiful. *Si elle n'est point noble, elle mérite bien de l'être,—et le deviendra!* I never beheld a more exquisitely interesting girl."

" I quite agree with you, Forreston," drawled Lord Bernard Neville, across the table, arraying himself as usual in Lord Forreston's cast off opinions, " and if she were not married I would propose to her myself."

Lord Forreston finished his *marrons glacés* without deigning to explain; and from that day, Miss Dudley became the observed of all observers; the object of Lady Alberville's jealousy, of Lord Bernard's devotion, and of the general admiration of the slavish multitude of London; while Lady Willersdale—to whom Chatterbox-Brill had, with due reservation, recounted the scene—could not but wonder at his prolonged estrangement.

Meanwhile the experienced Forreston had carefully noted her first embarrassment in his presence—her gradual surprise—her eventual pique; and seizing a dextrous moment to throw

his line into the troubled waters, he approached her one evening in the hurry of her *entrée* to a *proverbe* given in the private theatre of Lady Alberville: and with the most self-possessed *insouciance* inquired after the health of Sir Stephen and Lady Mordaunt, and requested the honour of a presentation to Miss Dudley.

Startled out of all remembrance of her intended *hauteur*, Lady Willersdale not only hastened to comply with his request, but joined in their conversation with the graceful amenity that confesses a desire to please, and a facility of being pleased. Lord Forreston however, who was versed in the worldly art of economizing his attentions, soon left the room; and Helen secretly avowed, and Florence candidly expressed an opinion that no other man in London could have proved himself so perfectly agreeable in so short a time.

It was not many days after this occurrence, that Captain Mordaunt entered the morning-room in Hamilton Place, followed by his former *frère d'armes*.

"I have brought Lord Forreston to visit you, my dear Helen; although I could scarcely

persuade him that your door would be open to morning loungers, or that you would at least make an exception in favour of ourselves."

"No one can have less claim to Lady Willersdale's indulgence," added Forreston, in a low voice, advancing to make his bow; "indeed I have scarcely any upon her recollection."

"I make it a rule to forget every thing at the beginning of a new season," said Helen, graciously, "except my friends, and those of my family."

Lord Forreston appeared to accept the olive branch thus extended, with an air of grateful satisfaction; and while Lady Willersdale and Miss Dudley resumed the *broderie* in which they had been previously occupied, a little circle was formed; and its dialogue became lively, and intimate, turning upon the *on dits* of the day, and the announced gaieties of the coming season.

"In crossing St. James's Street this morning," said Captain Mordaunt, "I received the congratulations of no less than three idlers upon an accession of family honours. I am told,

Helen, that you have taken Lady Danvers's list; or rather, that you are to be the new patroness."

"Such was the report last night at White's," added Forreston, "and various pretensions were formed, and numerous bets laid, concerning the probable distribution of your favour."

"In the first place," said her brother, "*I* protest against the Forsyths; I shall never pardon them for deserting the respectable sphere which was of right their own."

"Your protest, my dear brother, is as superfluous and as Quixotic as the Duke of N.'s against the Catholic Question. I have no patronage to bestow or withhold;—the honour was offered me, indeed,—but a thousand reasons induced me to decline it."

"Quite right," observed Lord Forreston. "What had *you* to gain from such an invidious distinction?—A doubtful position in society, or a large family of ugly daughters, might apologize for the heroism of a woman devoting herself to martyrdom in such a cause; but Lady Willersdale would be inexcusable in rational eyes for bestowing her time and patience on such a

labour of folly; and for involving herself in the paltry *tracasseries* of a society, which it is her business to keep—where it will be satisfied to remain—*at her feet*."

"It was humility, however, rather than pride, which motived my refusal. I am revealing no secret to *you*, Lord Forreston, or to my two friends, in confessing that I find myself by accident rather than by desert or right, the wife of the prime minister of England; and that I am but a single season removed from my provincial obscurity. The muster-roll of the *clique* of fashion is at present only half familiar to me; for, after all, *le dictionnaire des etiquettes* forms but a dry study of those born without the pale of the purlieus of the courts of kings. I know nothing of your bye-laws, your prejudices, your antipathies, and excommunications;—a duchess is still to me a duchess, however dowdy; and I should neither dream of rejecting a Lady Julia for being too fat, nor a Lady Maria from the disfigurement of her red hair. Were Almack's a purely aristocratic reunion, claimable by privilege of peerage, there could be no difficulty in adjusting the demands of its aspirants; but

the decrees of mere fashion are too arbitrary, and too ungracious, and too difficult of comprehension, to one so inexperienced as myself."

"You remind me of the malefactor whose plea of insanity was rejected, from the subtle logic with which he proved himself to be mad. But whatever your motive, real or alleged, I cannot but revere, Lady Willersdale, the prudence of your decision."

"Miss Dudley says nothing," interrupted Captain Mordaunt. "Perhaps she already regrets the delicious security of having her interests safe in the immediate hands of a patroness."

"Lady Willersdale has already the promise of subscriptions for the season for us both," replied Florence, lifting her face from her work, and throwing back the raven hair which had intruded over her beautiful forehead. "But as you provoke me by this accusation of selfishness, allow me to assure you that even with my insignificant experience of society, I despise your Almack's altogether."

"Indeed!" said Lord Forreston, "are you aware of the pains and penalties annexed to

such a declaration? Do you know that you may remain partnerless for the whole season?—that you may be burned at the tea-room fire for heresy?"

"Yet I formed my bold opinion upon the good information of one of the most exclusive of the exclusives,—who assured me last night, 'that Almack's was the most unflirtable ball in London;—*'qu'on y étoit trop en évidence;*—that in the memory of the oldest dowager, its glaring publicity had never been selected as the local of a proposal;—that the decided *abonnées*, who are as sure to be found there as the chandeliers, are neglected at other balls, and postponed as partners till the inevitable Wednesday night; that it forms an indispensable certificate to persons of doubtful *ton;* but a work of supererogation to those who are better amused elsewhere."

"Excellent!" exclaimed Lord Forreston, perceiving by the contemptuous glance of Miss Dudley's eye, that her maxims were ironically recited. "Who could not swear to one of Lady Juliana C.'s *tirades.*"

"Pardon me, my instructress was a person far more interesting to yourself."

Lord Forreston coloured deeply with the gratification of discovering that *himself* and his predilections had not escaped notice in Hamilton Place. He did not, however, disclaim the insinuation.

"As I perceive that Lady Alberville has favoured you with her confession of fashionable faith, you will be the more surprised to learn, as I have already learned from herself, that she has graciously accepted the post rejected by Lady Willersdale's better discernment."

"By no means!—like other potentates, she will despise the mob she rules."

"And no one," added Lady Willersdale, "can be better versed in the art of its government. The world of fashion is all her own; *et elle connoit bien son monde!* Besides, Lady Alberville is at present unincumbered by the care of a husband's popularity; a care which must necessarily have fettered my own movements in a similar position."

"Long may she remain so," observed Lord Forreston, rising with a parting bow. "We cannot spare so brilliant a meteor to the twi-

light of domestic life;—no, no!—let her remain a patroness."

Captain Mordaunt suffered his friend to depart alone, with a view to interrogating Miss Dudley's opinions of her new acquaintance.

She did not, however, keep him in suspense; acknowledging that of all the strangers she had seen in London, Lord Forreston was the only one gifted with the *air noble*, her inexperience had assigned to the universal aristocracy of England.

"Forming my conclusions from Lord Willersdale's person and address," she added, "I had expected to find the whole nobility graceful, and polished, and intellectual; and I almost wish that the error of my judgment had not been ecrtified by the sight of Lord K——, and Lord S——; or by the sound of Lord Bernard Neville's *niaiseries*. But this Lord Forreston of yours, Captain Mordaunt, is a younger brother of the Willersdale school."

"For his sanity's sake, I rejoice that he is out of hearing; for I fancy he is somewhat more than Willersdale's contemporary."

"Not quite;" observed Captain Mordaunt,

" but he is within a year of the fatal forty; a fact betrayed by the provoking veracity of the peerage. But have a care of your enthusiasm in his cause, Miss Dudley: have a care!—for I forewarn you that Forreston is not a marrying man."

" Nor *I* a marrying woman!" replied Florence, neither resentfully, nor discomposedly. And as Captain Mordaunt at that moment took leave of them, Lady Willersdale hastened to remonstrate with her on her rejoinder.

" Not a marrying woman! *voilà bien une phrase de demoiselle!*"

" But not the less a true assertion on my part. How! my dear Lady Willersdale!—can you suppose that *I*, who know so well the miserable influence extending from the poverty of an Irish landlord over his wretched dependents, that I can still selfishly dream of augmenting the embarrassments of the Mitford family?—that I, who know and care for every inmate of every hovel on its estates, could wish to wring the means of my future subsistence out of their squalid labours?"

"Indeed I do not! and still less do I imagine that you would condescend to waste your affections on one who has consented to resign them."

"Harry Mitford has done well!" resumed Florence indignantly, "and I will follow his example."

"But I wish you would begin your good works by resigning the prejudice that this Anacharsis Cloots of yours represents the whole human race.—You have Lord Barton at your feet—Mellerton—my poor brother;—and unless I am much mistaken, Lord Forreston, the unique and supreme Forreston himself, is already on the critical verge of a sentiment."

"Possibly!—but not for me.—*Nous verrons.*"

The conversation was now interrupted by the arrival of Lady Isabella Vyvyan, who came to insure the company of Florence Dudley in a visit to Lady Gertrude Wentworth; who as she was well disposed to escape from a further discussion with Lady Willersdale on the subject of her private attachments and public admirers, readily consented; while Helen resolved to devote the period of her absence to

a visit in Wilton Crescent, where Lady Mordaunt was now established.

She was aware that her mother was not at present very graciously inclined towards her. Lady Mordaunt, although herself *très bien nichée*, and well satisfied with her quarters,—since her importance among all the Forsyths enabled her to take liberties with *their* carriages and servants, such as she could not have practised towards those of her awful ministerial son-in-law,—and although "poor little Emma," was still much too young to be billetted upon her elder sisters,—still she could not endure to see another person,—*Mordauntic* neither in kith, kin, nor alliance,—sharing in the splendours and enjoying the domestic happiness of Hamilton Place. She felt that Helen and Helen's prosperity were still in some measure her property; and she could not bring herself to understand how *her* daughter should have formed friendships so intimate as those of her Irish *liaisons* without *her* concurrence. Lady Isabella and Lady Theodosia she could have forgiven; but this Miss Dudley was a nobody; as far as she could discover, (from Mr. Brill's

court circular;) a young person brought up for a governess, with all sorts of out-of-the-way accomplishments.

"When I dined in Hamilton Place," she had already confidently observed to Mrs. Montagu Forsyth, "I made it a point of conscience to be as rude to her as possible. I even hinted my disapprobation of the connexion to Lord Willersdale."

"Well, mamma?"

"Oh! he answered me very shortly, with one of his grandee-of-Spain looks, that Miss Dudley was the daughter of one of his oldest and most esteemed friends."

"I only hope Helen will never want *me* to dine with her again; for I am ready to creep under the table whenever Lord Willersdale even looks at me."

With a tolerable suspicion of the prejudices existing against her and her husband, Lady Willersdale was amazed beyond description by the cordiality of reception that now awaited her in Wilton Crescent. She had dreaded that her mother would have been all indignation at the report of her having declined those Almack's

honours, hereafter available to *dear* Emma, and the *poor dear* little Lilfields; and she was still utterly at a loss to account for her affectionate *empressement*. The mystery was soon explained. A letter from Fern Wood by that day's post, had announced Sir Herbert Gray's appointment to a very lucrative commissionership; a most unsolicited and flattering evidence of Lord Willersdale's regard, and one sufficiently valuable to a man of narrow income and extensive offspring. Helen did not dare acknowledge that she was guiltless of any share in this welcome act of friendship; but she reserved to herself the right of thanking her husband on her return home, for the delicate and considerate manner in which he had thus testified his sympathy in the interests of her family.

"And now, my dear Helen!" exclaimed Lady Mordaunt, after the first explosion of her delight at the prospect of having another daughter settled in town,—another beloved daughter, at whose house to dine or sleep, as occasion might require,—"and now, my dear child, as this appears a day devoted to family

affection, you must positively grant a little favour I have to ask of yourself."

Lady Willersdale, trusting this little favour might extend no further than her box at the play or opera, readily assented.

"It is for the Harley Street Forsyths; and really their conduct to our dear Jane has been so kind, so liberal, so parental, that they have a right to every attention at our hands."

Dear Jane, who could by no means overcome her awe of a sister whose name had found its way into the peerage, now applied herself assiduously to her carpet-work, in order to escape the anticipated terrors of the gentle Helen's negative; while Helen herself, prepared by weekly experience for an application for some 'snug little place' for a superannuated butler, —drunken coachman—or own maid's sister's husband's nephew, resigned herself to her destiny.

"I shall only be too happy, dear mamma, to oblige any friends of yours or my sisters."

"Well, my dear, these poor people have quite set their hearts upon a concession, such as

I can hardly hope to obtain from your excellent lord!"

"Pray heaven," thought Helen, "they may not be looking for a commissionership for their second son!"

"They are most anxious that Lord Willersdale and yourself should honour them by your company at dinner!"

"Is that all!" said Helen, laughing in the happy relief of her apprehensions. "You have a very singular way, mamma, of conferring a favour on ourselves. Lord Willersdale has the greatest possible respect for Mr. Forsyth as a political colleague;—I met Mrs. Forsyth and her daughters one evening last week at the Duke of ——'s, who appears quite enchanted with their singing;—he was even so kind as to present me, and we have since exchanged cards."——

"A condescension on your part which has emboldened them to hope that you will meet his Grace and the C.s some day at dinner in Harley Street."

"I trust, Jane," continued Lady W., turning to her sister, "you will persuade Mr. and

Mrs. Forsyth to fix on some early moment for the engagement, as I look forward with pleasure to the improvement of our acquaintance."

"I wonder what my daughter Lilfield will say to this appointment of our dear Gray's," observed Lady Mordaunt, after a pause. "For to own the truth, she was never very sanguine about Lord Willersdale's intentions towards our family. However, now that he has once made a sort of *amende honorable* by this beginning, I think she must admit with me, that Jack's turn may come, and William's too. William, indeed, says he has no ambition beyond a prebend or an archdeaconry; and that, any one may command."

"When do you expect the Lilfields in town?" inquired Helen, anxious to change the subject of conversation.

"Indeed, my dear, I cannot say; though I had a letter from Anna Maria a day or two ago. But at this season of the year she is so taken up with the distribution of the new liveries and new books to her two schools: and with her soup charity, and blanket-loan institution, that she quite forgot to allude to poor Sir Robert's

health. She has not even told me how the children got through the scarlet fever; nor thanked me for the tabinet you were so good as to present to me for their use; for she seems to be quite occupied with a little tiff she has had with the Duchess of Delvile."

"I am sorry that any misunderstanding should have arisen between such near neighbours."

"Why it is but a trifle; but then if my daughter Lilfield has a fault, it is being tenacious about trifles. You see, my dear, when the Duchess made her appearance at the Castle this winter, it was under a sort of cloud; the duke had been—to speak it tenderly—turned out; and it was universally admitted that, from the weakness betrayed by his party while in power, he could never come in again—could not even carry his administration through a single sessions, you know! Well—Anna Maria, fully aware of all these circumstances, and feeling of course with, and for, our dear Lord Willersdale, (poor Anna Maria has very strong family feelings,) was much less *empressée* than usual in paying her visit of welcome to the

Duchess; and, between ourselves, gave it rather indiscreetly as her reason to the dean's lady, that as Sir Ralph Harberton was settled at the Castle, she had made up her mind as the mother of a family, not to countenance such proceedings any further. Now what does the Duchess do—and it was certainly the revenge of a very mean narrow mind——"

"The Duchess!" interrupted Mrs. Montagu Forsyth, taking a false stitch with consternation; "why, surely my sister Lilfield never talked so of the Duchess to her face."

"My dear Jane! your sister is good breeding itself! Oh no!--but then the Close of a cathedral town is like the whispering gallery at St. Paul's; and the very first time the Duchess went to Durham, she heard the whole story."

"And did she remonstrate?"

"No—she laughed heartily; drove to the haberdasher's and draper's, and ordered the Christmas suits for her schools, exactly on the pattern of Anna Maria's. Now the Beech Park children have worn green stuff with blue ribbons to their bonnets for the last ten years; and the Duchess's have always had blue gowns

with red; and this change makes a great confusion, and is only intended as an affront to the Lilfields."

"In the present precarious state of Sir Robert's health, I should have thought such a trifle might pass unnoticed."

"My dear Helen, you will one day learn that among persons of a certain rank, trivial occurrences are symptomatic of very serious opinions; and I quite agree with Anna Maria that this affair of the blue and green charity-frocks, will materially influence the next county election."

"Of which I trust," said Helen rising, and taking her leave, "there is no immediate prospect."

Meanwhile Lady Isabella Vyvyan, accompanied by Miss Dudley, arrived at the dingy door of a tall red brick house in St. James's Square; where, on the sanction of a gray-headed porter, and an equally venerable butler, whose gouty deliberation of ascent gave them leisure to admire the inlaid *parquet* of the old fashioned and uncarpeted stairs, they were for-

mally ushered into the stately presence of Lady Gertrude Wentworth.

The vast drawing-room in which the old lady was seated,—cold, and dismal, and dismantled,—formed a singular contrast with the profuse and overwrought elegance of the apartments in Hamilton Place. Five tall narrow windows with small panes, and wainscot window-seats, were scantily disguised by undraperied curtains of faded damask. Vast sophas and tall straight-backed chairs, covered with a similar material, and framed with tarnished gilding, completed the decorations of the room; with the exception of three huge skeleton-legged mahogany tables, black with age, and lustrous with superfluous manual labour. Beside one of these,—on which lay a quarto edition of Chesterfield, a pair of spectacles, and a snuff-box,—sat the upright individual they had come to visit;—and its manner of rising perpendicularly on their approach, of curtseying, and motioning them to their uneasy seats, could only have been imitated by some of the obsolete automata in Weeks's museum.

"Cold weather, Ma'am; but seasonable," said Lady Gertrude, after contracting her lips into a very unpromising expression of dissatisfaction.

"We have felt it severely in our journey from Ireland," replied Lady Isabella, somewhat daunted by the sternness of her air and voice; "where the last commission I received from my sister Lady Theodosia Mitford, was to make a visit of inquiry after your ladyship's health, immediately on my arrival in town."

"Lady Theodosia!" said the old lady relaxing from her stateliness—for her deafness had as much insured her ignorance of their names, as her blindness of their persons,—"she is a relation I love and esteem! how is she,—and why does she never let me hear from her?"

"My sister is perhaps too sensible of your displeasure towards the General, to imagine *herself* an object of interest."

"Lady Theodosia has every reason to trust in the continuance of my regard."

"In one respect she has presumed upon that expectation, by commissioning me to present to your ladyship's notice, her young friend, Miss

Dudley, who is ambitious to obtain your good opinion."

Lady Gertrude now deliberately turned a front fire upon poor Florence; having previously girded on her spectacles for the investigation; and Miss Dudley, preserving her gravity as well as she could from the influence of the grimaces of awe which Lady Isabella took this occasion to telegraph over her shoulder, rose and greeted her scrutiny with a very respectful curtsey. Lady Gertrude, however, did not deign to recognize the compliment; after gazing stedfastly on the face of her young guest, she turned her eyes upon an old-fashioned portrait in crayons gracing the chimney-piece; stared again upon Florence, and again upon the picture; and after a minute's silence, turned once more to Lady Isabella without further notice or courtesy to the astonished girl.

"Your ladyship has been residing abroad, I think. May I ask if you have any family?"

"I have a son, who from his similarity of age with poor little Ferdinand Mitford, must have proved, I fear, an unwelcome guest at the lodge. He does not in my own opinion, how-

ever, so much resemble my nephew, as the young lady before you."

"*You* see it then!" said Lady Gertrude, with some slight twinkling of emotion in her countenance, and pushing away her snuff-box with petulance. "Pray Miss—Miss—"

"Miss Dudley"—said Lady Isabella.

"Pray young lady are you acquainted with my nephew?"

Florence, to whose mind *one* nephew of Lady Gertrude Wentworth's was most especially present, replied, with animation, "I have known him with the most friendly intimacy from my childhood."

"Strange! that he never alluded to so striking a resemblance!"

"I was not aware that Harry had the happiness of being personally known to your ladyship."

"*Harry!*—what Harry?—I was alluding to my nephew Ferdinand,—to Lord Forreston."

"While *I* spoke of Mr. Henry Mitford;" explained Florence, with an humbled air and guilty blush.

"And pray who *is* Mr. Henry Mitford?"

said Lady Gertrude, turning towards her matron guest for further explanation.

" Surely your ladyship must have heard of a son left by poor Ferdinand Mitford, who was drowned at Majorca; the young man has been brought up by the General and Lady Theodosia; and is in fact presumptive heir to the Mitford estate."

" Very unaccountable! that they should never have recommended him to my notice. I had presumed to fancy myself of some little consequence to the family."

" So much indeed, that Theodosia could not venture to break through your ladyship's interdiction against all mention of her unfortunate brother-in-law's name."

" Ferdinand Mitford was a fool and a spendthrift, and disgraced himself by a miserable connexion. Still, as a mere matter of respect, methinks I should have been made acquainted with the existence of this boy. My sister Mitford—and my sister Seymour," she again looked towards the picture as she pronounced the latter name—" were equally dear to me; but my two Mitford nephews, by their personal

misconduct, thought proper to forfeit all claim on my affection; while Seymour—Lord Forreston, I mean,—has conducted himself through life with decorum and regard towards the noble line from whence he springs."

"Lord Forreston appears to have been careful that you should remain in ignorance of his young cousin's existence."

"What should *he* know of a Connaught bog-trotter?—Pray how old is the boy?"

"Mr. Mitford," replied Florence, to whom this question was addressed, "has lately entered the dragoons, and is now aid-de-camp to his Excellency the Lord Lieutenant."

Poor Florence! she was not aware that Lady Isabella was laughing at the swelling air of dignity with which she had uttered this explanatory announcement.

"Humph!—in the army,—a man grown—good looking?"

"One of the finest young men in Ireland," replied Lady Isabella. "Very like the General, and consequently presenting a strong family likeness to the House of Wentworth."

"Most extraordinary!—most unaccountable!

—that Mitford should have placed my nephew —*his* nephew, I mean—in the army, during the Duke of Delvile's administration,—and without applying for my advice or interest."

"I have frequently heard the General lament that Lady Gertrude Wentworth's well-merited estrangement from himself, should prevent the possibility of his seeking her good offices for poor Harry."

Lady Isabella, perceiving that the old lady's curiosity was piqued to the uttermost, now judged it expedient to withdraw, before the eagerness of her interest became diminished. While she was taking a very formal leave, the venerable Lady Gertrude suddenly advanced from her chair of state towards the retiring Florence, and with a sudden impulse of graciousness, stretched out her bony hand towards her.

"You must visit me again, young lady. I am always to be found during the afternoon; and it will give me pleasure to receive a young friend of my dear Lady Theodosia's, and one who—who," she looked again from Miss Dudley towards the picture—"one who singularly

recalls to my heart the features of many who have been dear to me."

"The old wretch!—the mummy! the petrifaction!"—exclaimed Lady Isabella, when they were once more shut up in the carriage. "*Embrasse-moi, mon enfant je voudrois être degélée au plutôt!*—Oh! that I had a thermometer to determine the number of degrees below freezing point to which that woman's *accueil* has reduced me!"

"Do not abuse her! she is a curious relic of the last century. I thought we had retrograded into the Spectator or one of Richardson's novels!—And then her farewell was almost courteous to *me;* and she shewed some interest for poor Harry!"

"Well, well! thaw her if you can—for both your sakes! and then we will defy Forreston, and the General, and the whole world!—Do not omit to visit her again; look your best; listen to her patiently, and the field is won!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Que diable est ce la?—Ils n'ont rien que les grands Seigneurs à me reprocher ; et moi je ne vois rien de si beau que de hanter de grands Seigneurs. Il n-y-a qu'honneur et civilité avec eux; et je voudrois qu'il m'eût coûté deux doigts de la main, et être né Comte or Marquis.

Le Bourgeois gentilhomme.

Now the importance of the projected dinner party in Harley-Street, however trifling according to the estimation of the Willersdales, had been by no means exaggerated by Lady Mordaunt in her internuncioship between the parties; and when Florence Dudley listlessly indited a card of acceptance in return for that of invitation, very little did she imagine the tremor, and flutter, and family commotion likely to arise from its perusal.

The Forsyths felt themselves to have attained,

at that moment, a pinnacle of worldly elevation beyond their hopes, and almost equal to their desires;—the Prime-Minister of England was about to grace their board!!—Even James senr. himself was vulnerable to a stroke of fortune such as this; he had been for years, and upon steady principle, a zealous supporter of Lord Willersdale's party; he revered him as a man and a minister; and without sharing any of the prospective ambition of his wife and daughters, or suspecting the paltry management by which they had secured their object, he exulted that, as a British merchant, he was possessed of means and station to offer a becoming entertainment beneath his own roof, to the subject of highest account in his Majesty's favour, and the love and confidence of the whole nation. He listened with indifference to Mrs. Forsyth's announcement that the Marquis and Marchioness of C. and Lady Juliana had also promised to be of the party; and unconsciously sanctioned further invitations to the Duke of ——, to Lord C——, and Sir William and Lady de Hauteville; who, with the family in Wilton Crescent and their own, would fill the

list and their dinner-table. But in the fulness of his pride he diverged on the following day, on his road from the Barbican towards Ludgate Hill; and previous to his re-entrance into the western world of civilization, he had commissioned Messrs. Rundell and Bridge to affix the Forsyth shield,—one of the most elaborate and mendacious imaginations of the Herald's College,—to a pair of splendid gilt candelabra, with a dessert service to match. The services of the erudite Monsieur Louis Eustache Ude, with a sufficient *état major* of *marmitons* had already been insured for the gastronomic benefit of

> The great—the important—festive Saturday,
> Big with the fate of Forsyth and his guests.

It is strange how a single occurrence, apparently so simple in cause and effect as a dinner to be eaten in the parish of Marylebone, can occupy the invention and labour and anxieties of a whole legion of human beings! During the seventeen days which intervened between the promise of the feast and its performance, what horticultural vigils were bestowed upon the maturement of pines and grapes and straw-

berries!—what sweltering furnaces roared for the completion of the gilded salvers,—what graphic art was expended upon the gules, and wyverns allotted by Sir Isaac Heard to the house of Forsyth!— Beasts of the field and birds of the air were daintily administered unto in their compulsory meals, by the provident intervention of Louis Eustache:

And quails were crammed, that Willersdale might dine.

But even these efforts, although severe and profitable in their degree, were little in comparison with the mental exertions and personal agitation of the females of the Forsyth family, during those seventeen probationary days.— *Their dress!*—would it be better to affect an elegant simplicity, or to acknowledge the honours they were receiving by a thrice-double-elaboration of splendour?—*The duke!*—would he come?—He, the most courteous and gracious of dignitaries, had not yet returned an answer to their card! How was the illustrious crowd to be marshalled?—How could they previously arrange the business, so that Lady C. might be blest with a prosy neighbour—and Lady Juliana with her favourite flirt?—The

party was aristocratic, and refined even to their heart's content; but its plan of action was an affair of difficulty. Fortunately Lady Mordaunt, whom they regarded as an oracle of *bienséances*, was never weary of bestowing her experienced advice;—the only thing she was ever known to give away.

While these unsuspected measures were proceeding towards their crisis, Lord Forreston was not slow to profit by the gracious sanction bestowed by the rash Helen on the renewal of their acquaintance. At the opera, he was generally found waiting her arrival in the vicinity of her box; he shared with Captain Mordaunt the flattering task of escorting Lady Willersdale and her young friend in their daily ride; he had always some morning message to convey from Lady Alberville; and frequently offered to become the bearer of notes, and music, and *petit riens* between Florence and Lady Isabella Vyvyan. The fashionable world, wherein Miss Dudley's extraordinary beauty and matchless *fraicheur* had excited a lively sensation, attributed this constancy of attention to the weakness of a sudden passion for the loveliest *dé-*

butante of the season; and he was himself at some pains to countenance the opinion. Lord Mellerton already began to rally Florence upon her conquest; and Lord Bernard Neville assured her that Lord Forreston had been an excellent husband to his first wife. But William Daly—although he had become sufficiently indifferent to the measure of Miss Dudley's suitors,—since he had already devoted his homage to Lucy Forsyth and her 50,000*l.*—continued to listen incredulously to all this waste of compliment. He saw that the cunning Forreston was too old a bird to be easily *pris aux lacs;* and by a sort of freemasonry in duplicity, readily ascertained that his present finesse in Hamilton Place was but that of *reculer pour mieux sauter.*

But was Lady Willersdale herself equally discerning?—Was Helen a deceiver or deceived in attributing the present *dévouement* of her former admirer to the charms of her new companion?—Perhaps she might have been puzzled to reply with candour to the inquiry! She had been piqued by his neglect—dazzled by his super-eminence of fashionable popularity—and

flattered by his renewed homage. Her actual position in the world was one of unprecedented brilliancy. Young, beautiful, wealthy,—wedded with the most successful minister of his time,—and far above even these advantages, since of all earthly favours, that of the London *beau monde* is the most arbitrary and capricious—she was herself a personal object of the ephemeral adoration of the world of fashion. It was but natural, therefore, that she should covet the allegiance of the only being who shared with her the sway of this frivolous empire; and that having won his reluctant tribute, she should exult in her triumph.

Every day she saw less and less of Lord Willersdale. Engrossed by the mighty trust committed to his charge, he usually returned to his own home with a harassed brow, and preoccupied demeanour; and unwilling to damp the youthful gaiety of the two lovely beings by whom he found himself eagerly and affectionately welcomed, he was prompt to bid them go forth and share in the pleasures of the society they adorned. He seemed proud that the honour of his name should be sustained in the gay world by a wife

so graceful, so gentle, so gloriously gifted as his beautiful Helen. In his hour of danger he had first become satisfactorily assured of the tenderness of her regard towards himself; in the seclusion of their Irish domicile, he had been intensely gratified by a more intimate acquaintance with the moral excellence of her heart, and by his observation of the progressive strengthening of its principles of action. He saw in her character no defect beyond the instability consequent upon youth and inexperience; and while he sometimes doubted his own wisdom in having committed his honour and happiness to such slight keeping—in having brought this very youth and inexperience in contact with the rocks and shoals of fashionable life—he found full many an excuse in the fondness of his affection. "It is the difficult passage," he said, "the strait, and the reef, and the quicksand, which form the pilot's best experience; the rude schooling of the living world will teach her more than the sententious wisdom of a thousand homilies."

Now Lady Willersdale, thus wholly abandoned to her own guidance, was finally led by

the confidence of her husband, to *believe* in its excellence. She knew so little of the world, that she was even unconscious of the value of such knowledge. She had seen reputations forfeited; but as in the instances of Lady Danvers, and of the Duchess of Delvile, they had been lost by gross depravity; by obvious outrages against the laws of decency. She had yet to learn that the fairest fame may be blighted by a guiltless disregard to the conventional rules of society; and that the most important purpose of a libertine is already half fulfilled, when he can obtain pardon for his first offence.

That first offence had, in the present instance, been of so peculiar and solitary a nature, that Helen was sometimes inclined to challenge her own memory as to the possibility of its actual occurrence; and always ended her doubts with a self-assurance that it must have been the casual effect of intemperance. Colonel Seymour had rushed to the fête at Burwood, from the excitement of a convivial dinner at the villa of Lady Alberville; except on that single occasion, he had never approached her with even the semblance of gallantry; and as the

letter he had addressed to her on the following day had been returned unopened, it was now impossible to determine whether its contents had confirmed or apologized for the preceding indiscretion of the writer. In this state of indecision, Lady Willersdale persuaded herself that it was an unnecessary exertion of prudery, to frown away the attentions of so delightful a companion as Lord Forreston; particularly as they were in a great measure addressed to her young friend. She persuaded herself that she was not justified in slighting so brilliant a prospect of establishment for her *protégée*. Forreston was pointed out as an *excellent parti*, by the assiduities of all the finessing mammas about town; Florence herself confessedly accorded him a preference over every other among their male acquaintance; and thus—*soit foiblesse—soit aveuglement*,—Lady W. permitted herself to sanction the daily visits and nightly attendance of the deceiver.

He had the art indeed of making his presence so little remarked, of adapting himself so skilfully to the humour and occupation of the hour, of disappearing so quietly whenever or

wherever he found himself *de trop*, that for some time his visits to Hamilton Place remained unobserved. But if Helen and Florence were soothed by the charms of his conversation, and the pliancy of his habits, into this ready endurance of his importunity; the world—the monoptic world—with its one fierce, undazzled, malignant eye, unceasingly fixed upon the frailties of its giddy puppets,—had already noted that the fair wife of the Premier was unfailingly guarded by Forreston's protection, while her brother or Mr. Daly was sent in search of her equipage;—that during the preceding season she had been among the most animated of the waltzers at Almack's, where she now remained, like the chair-stricken lady in Comus, enchanted to the satin sofa of the chaperons. Who could suppose that this sudden change had been effected by Helen's discovery of her husband's disapproval?—Was it not more natural and more easy to believe, that she was willing to devote her undisturbed attention to the indolent devotee who lounged beside her, or "hung over her enamoured?"—*D'ailleurs*, was it not an undeniable fact, that nothing short of *her*

presence had availed to attract the fastidious Forreston within reach of the saccharine emanations of Willis's "*Raffinerie de sucre?*"—Full many a tactical dowager already profited by a fact so notorious, and presumed to bait her invitations to the unprocurable Seymour, by an assurance of Lady Willersdale's expected presence at her fête; while others—ay! —even persons piquing themselves upon their moral character as members of the Christian community,—displayed their knowledge of "who and who were together," by carefully assigning Lord Forreston's place at their dinner-table side by side with the wife of Lord Willersdale!

There were many, meanwhile, who noticed this growing intelligence with surprise and regret. Lord Barton, who still regarded Helen as one of the most enchanting, and most purely-intentioned of her sex, not only permitted himself to represent to Lady Isabella the danger of such a connexion, in the certainty that her loquacious indiscretion would reveal his warning to her friend; but addressed the expression of his anxieties in a letter to Lady Theodosia Mitford; satisfied that her vigilant tendernes

for the interests of Miss Dudley must insure some interference on her part. But another person—one whose opinions were upheld by the kindred rights of brotherly love—had already taken upon himself the graceless office of admonition.

"Forreston is very much here," observed Captain Mordaunt one day, when a second visit of Miss Dudley's to St. James's Square had left his sister alone.

"Yes!—constantly;—we see him almost every day. But he is one of those whose visits will bear repetition;—his flow of conversation is equally various and unceasing."

"I have always heard that he was a man who knew how to render his society dangerously agreeable to women; and as you, my dear Helen, are unfortunately so much emancipated from your husband's control and observation, so young yourself, and married to a man of more than double your age, perhaps it would be better were you to expose yourself less to his attractions. Forreston is not a very safe acquaintance, either for your happiness or your reputation."

"Or for your own prospects of success with Florence Dudley?—Fie! brother;—I did not think you were so selfish."

"My prospects of success!—a pair of epaulettes and two hundred a-year would certainly form an inviting settlement for a girl who sees half London at her feet! That I admire and love Florence I do not attempt to deny; and in Mellerton's place, or Forreston's or Barton's, I should not hesitate to venture a proposal. My private belief assures me, however, that any or all of us would be refused; as much as your own persuasion secretly assures *you*, sister, that Jack Mordaunt has no thoughts of any such rash attempt."

"But you have no right to measure Lord Forreston's intentions by your own, or the feelings of Florence towards him by your own prejudices. She has acknowledged to me that she prefers him to any of her declared admirers;—he has openly avowed his opinion that Miss Dudley is the most captivating girl in London; and what right have I to discountenance so promising a connexion,—what right have *you* to attribute his attentions to an improper motive?"

"I have known Forreston for years—as a libertine in thought, word, and deed; and I have every reason to believe that he is not a marrying man."

"So it was always said of Willersdale—yet, I thank heaven, the verdict of society has been gainsayed! Besides, Lord Forreston has only recently acquired the gifts of rank and fortune which generally incline a man to settle himself for life. His aunt, Lady Gertrude Wentworth, indeed, makes it a point of her inheritance that he should marry without further delay; she has taken an extraordinary *engouement* for Florence Dudley;—and I will not disguise from you that I shall do *my* part towards forwarding these coincidences into a marriage between my two friends."

"Poor Harry Mitford!—so after all that giddy Lady Isabella, with all her seeming levity, remains his only partizan!"

"Why should *you* support his *one* epaulette and *one* hundred a-year against your own claims?"

"Because I have hitherto believed them backed by the stedfast attachment of the wo-

man he loves. Henceforth I shall pity him more, and regard her less."

Miss Dudley, followed by Lord Forreston, now entered the room. He had overtaken her it appeared, on her return across the Green Park to Hamilton Place, and offered her his arm; a fact which called forth a triumphant glance from Lady Willersdale towards her brother. But he was already engaged in earnest conversation with Florence upon the beauties of the new palace, and an anticipation of all the splendours which a resident court must shortly shower upon the metropolis; and did not, or would not reply.

"Shall you be at the opera early?" inquired Lord Forreston in a low voice, having seated himself close to Helen's *sécrétaire*.

"I fear not;—we dine with the Forsyths. I have been obliged to send Lord Willersdale's excuse, as he will be detained at the privy council; and I must make the *amende honorable* in my own person, by staying the later in Harley Street."

"Forsyths!—the Forsyths?—do you mean

those two pretty little girls who have danced and sung and acted themselves into the patronage of my trusty cousin, Lady C.? What on earth can you have to do with such people;—*pourquoi vous hasarder en dérogeant jusqu'à cette canaille là?*"

"Simply because they are connexions of my own; my younger sister, Jane, whom you may remember at Mordaunt—having married into the family."

"I remember nothing of Mordaunt but its Helen.—But why should your sister's marriage commit *you?*—Do you imagine that the laws of *bon ton* submit themselves to the claims of kindred? Believe me I would not hazard the chance of being bored, or of being *encanaillé* among a set of people who evince their despicable taste by toadying themselves into society above their own level—like these Forsyths,—'no! not for Athens!'—I do not feel that even fathers and mothers have a right to intrude their vulgarity on the forbearance of their more civilized offspring; and I implore you, Lady Willersdale, *you* who are just now so highly placed in the favour of society—do not adven-

ture the ground you have gained by any such misplaced condescension."

"I am prouder meanwhile than even yourself; for my *fiérté* tells me I am wholly above the fear of contamination by dining in any house from Park Lane to Finsbury Square."

"*Ne jurez pas!* I shall impatiently expect your arrival at the opera; but I shall be careful not to betray to ears polite, the scene or society of the dinner that detains you. Come, Mordaunt! let us ride together; for we are keeping Lady Willersdale and Miss Dudley from their toilet. These people doubtless dine at six o'clock."

"I predict a fund of amusement for you both," added Captain Mordaunt, as he left the room. "The Forsyths form as delicious a moral picture, as the family of some *fermier général* of Marmontel's time."

Poor Forsyths!—their day of trial was come! and like Seged, king of Ethiopia—but I forbear!—verbose morality is obsolete;—the prose and poetry of all living languages, has become superfluous:—*tout est dit!*—and the velocity of steam-inventions seems to demand a correspon-

dent rapidity of narrative, dialogue, and discourse.

Poor Forsyths!—for three long days Ude and his white night-capped coadjutors had filled their subterraneous territories with clamours similar to those detected by the fairy princess, in the enchanted forest of *Riquet à la Houppe*. The mingled fumes of charcoal and steaming *casseroles* had invaded their mansion with savoury odours, such as might have sufficed to feed a whole regiment of dragoons; or to bend Sir G. W.'s knees into silent adoration on their very door-stone. And now the fatal day had dawned upon the last fiery ordeal!—The *Crêtes de coq glacés au jus de grenade*,—the *Salmi de Langues de lapin, farci aux pistaches*,—the *Sauté de foies de chapon à la Marengo*,—and *Cuisses d'alouette panés en papillote*, were in the very hour of alembic projection. Had the mortal remains of Lord Danvers reposed upon any shore less remote than that of the Bay of Naples, they would have assuredly stalked towards the coming feast after the fashion of Don Juan's *commendatore!* "True to the wished for day," the sub-delegates of Ludgate Hill

arrived at early morning in divers hackney coaches, bearing green-baize bags of most aureal promise. All things were *en train*—all things auspicious;—when lo! the appearance of Lord Willersdale's excuse, sounded an annunciatory toll to the knell of all their hopes.

James Forsyth Senr. in the agony of his disappointment, mounted his favourite mare, and jogged along the new road towards the Barbican—the Alpha and Omega of his consolations; leaving his wretched wife and daughters to encounter alone the yet unravelled misfortunes of the day, and provide uncounselled against their results. Scarcely, indeed, could he have attained the memorable trust of Battle Bridge, when "Sir William and Lady de Hauteville," on a sheet of note-paper of which the sable edge formed the preponderating surface, "presented their compliments, and regretted that the death of a near relative would deprive them of the honour of waiting upon Mr. and Mrs. Forsyth."

"Good heavens! Lucy!—three excuses!"

"*Five*—my dear mamma;—five. I see by the paper of to-day, that the duke is at Paris,

so that he has never received our card; and Lord C. informed papa last night at the French play, that *he* was on the point of setting off for Newmarket."

"How very rude!"

"Oh! we can dispense with *him;* for I persuaded my father to fill up his place by inviting Prince Auta Nauta, who was standing near us at the time."

"Who comes, of course! Those foreigners are always to be had. Well!—let me see; we have our four selves, and three from Wilton Crescent, Lady Willersdale and Miss Dudley. —Nine women!—for your father and Jem count for nothing as beaux. Then the three C's;—my dear girls what *is* to be done! Unless the table is laid for sixteen, it will neither contain the dinner nor the new plate;—a dinner at five and twenty guineas a head;—it is enough to drive one wild!"

"Let us go down to Wilton Crescent and consult Lady Mordaunt."

"Any thing but that; we have done nothing but ask her opinion this fortnight past; and Montagu informs me she writes every word of

our dilemmas and embarrassments to Beech Park; and I am sure Lady Lilfield is impertinent and patronizing enough already."

"Well! suggest some alternative!"

"In the first place, let me send an impromptu invitation in papa's name to Theodosius Brill."

"That odious creature!"

"Who, that is better worth having, would come on a few hours notice? Besides, one always meets him, horror as he is, at the C's; and Lady Juliana is so apt to put up her glass and her pretty lip at strangers."

"He will be affronted."

"*He* affronted! No! I will write in a *dégagé* off-hand way, 'Dear Brill, pray dine with me at seven, to meet our friends the C's and Willersdales;' and he will come, cap in paw, like a beggar's poodle."

"And the three others?"

"Why, I have been thinking, mamma, that you might send Lucy with a few *sucré* speeches to the Willis Clintons. He is always gentlemanlike and presentable any where; and Nancy, when she is *en grande toilette*, is really an elegant looking little woman. We must tell

her that Lady Willersdale and all the C's are coming; I am sure her curiosity will bring her."

"And Lucy, if you drive across the park, you will be certain to find Lord Mellerton; tell him we expect Lady Willersdale and Miss Dudley, and unless he happen to be engaged to royalty, I am equally persuaded that *he* will not decline the invitation."

Tranquillity was thus once more restored; the substitutes were all found placable; and the time that Charlotte and Lucy were attired in their new white gros de Naples dresses, and *coiffées en cheveux* by the classic hand of Alexandre, Lady Juliana and her noble parents were seated in the drawing room in Harley Street; and defending themselves with their *vinaigrettes* against the potent odours of the orange blossoms with which Lee and Kennedy had filled the *jardinières*. There is nothing so trying to a man's patience, or to a woman's looks, as the daylight half-hour preceding a *diner paré*. The invidious glare of the setting sun told awfully upon old Forsyth's ill cut suit and shuffling gait, and upon poor skinny Jane's blinking

visage; it even required all the youthful loveliness and personal elegance of Helen and Florence, to meet the criterion of "day's garish eye," without the detection of some borrowed or some diminished charm. They still waited for the Willis Clintons, for whom Mrs. Forsyth had sent her carriage; and the girls grew a little nervous, as they thought of Lady Juliana's scrutiny of two such obscure individuals; they had, however, given her sundry hints of the *recherche de toilette* required by the occasion.

What, therefore, was the horror of Lucy,—what the consternation of Charlotte,—when they beheld their cousin make her *entrée* in the shabbiest old gown and dowdiest old cap, that she could possibly contrive to redeem from some cast-off wardrobe; and followed by a broad red-faced, open-mouthed, thick-legged man, whom she introduced to her uncle as her husband's brother, Sir Thomas Willis Clinton, a captain in the militia! just arrived from Cheltenham, to stay with them for the season; "so that they were forced to take the liberty of intruding him upon Mr. Forsyth's hospitality." By the malicious smile lurking in her eyes, the

Miss Forsyths plainly perceived that all this was trick and imposture; and from that moment Prince Auta Nauta twirled his black mustachios at them in vain. They saw in the movement of Lady Juliana's lips, "Who on earth are those strange people?"—And distinctly heard Mr. Brill's whispered reply, "Illustrious relatives, I presume, of the family: not country cousins, but city cousins."—While old Forsyth quietly withdrew from the room to represent to the maitre d'hotel—hired for the occasion—the necessity of introducing a seventeenth *couvert.*

"*Mais Monsieur c'est une impossibilité! voilà tout l'ordre de mon diner abimé!—Un dix-septième couvert!—c'est une innovation qui va nous désorienter sans retour; d'ailleurs une de ces demoiselles pourroit se faire servir dans sa chambre.*"

But James Senr. was positive; the awkward seventeenth chair was duly intruded; and the discomfited master of the revels looked almost as cross as the master of the house, as he ushered the guests to their seats. Unfortunately Mrs. Willis Clinton, and the interpolated Sir Thomas

got placed exactly opposite to the exclusive Lady Juliana C—, and the sneering Mr. Brill;—Lady Willersdale was between the boring old Marquis, and her dummy brother-in-law (Jem); —and the mercurial gaiety of the animated Mellerton was neutralized between Lady C's India shawl, and Lady Mordaunt's tabinet gown;—he was actually dowagered into dulness. Some similar blunder — the fruit probably of the thwarted Chamberlain's ill-humour, had stationed Miss Dudley between Lucy and Charlotte; while Prince Anatole Auta Nauta was bestowing his choicest airs upon the terrified Mrs. Montagu Forsyth. All was wrong! — and consequently little lynx-eyed Mrs. Willis Clinton became radiant with smiles.

"Is Willersdale still so lucky as to retain Laurent?" inquired Lord C. of his neighbour, turning his wide carp-like eyes upon the morsel of *thon mariné* with which he was preparing his palate for his *potage.* "I look upon Laurent as a first-rate artist. His *cuisses d'oie confites* are equal to those of Thoulouse."

"He is fortunate in the approval of so ex-

quisite a connoiseur; but excepting as a civil industrious servant, his merits are lost upon *us*."

"Civil!—

So would I have my footman, not my cook.

Let me recommend you this *macédoine salée*, Lady Willersdale!—the liver of the red mullet divorced from its own worthless flesh, and united with that of the golden Jack—of Quin's *Jean Doré*. Now what signifies the civility of an artist capable of a *plat* such as this?—Forsyth!"—raising his voice with his tremulous lip moistened by the anticipation of his *gourmandise:* "Forsyth! I congratulate you; you have got a *cordon bleu!*"

James Senr. somewhat mystified, replied by a silent bow, and by sending round the wine-steward with some exquisite Tinto. But Mrs. Willis Clinton was by no means quiescent under this disappointment.

"My dear uncle!—Lord C— wishes you joy on your acquisition of a *cordon bleu*."

Charlotte and Lucy who, from their father's glance at Lord C's own pompous ribbon, anticipated the coming *bévue*, bit their lips with consternation.

"I trust his lordship is aware that I am duly sensible of the honour of seeing him at my table."

Lady Juliana levelled her *lorgnette* successively and admiringly at the various interlocutors; and Mr. Brill hesitated only whether to bestow this transcendent *équivoque* on the inmates of Lord H's box, whither he proposed adjourning at the close of the dessert; or to retain it for White's window on the morrow. He knew himself to be on pun-sufferance in both places; and was willing to economize on so good a joke.—But his own turn was coming.

"I had the pleasure of drinking tea with your sister, Mrs. Skinner, last night," said Nancy, graciously addressing him across the table; "and was sorry to find Mr. S. confined with the face-ache;—he says his office is full of draughts —ha! ha! ha! not of deeds, but of air;—and when he changes his wig—"

"My dear Nancy! You are refusing champagne," interrupted Lucy Forsyth, heartily wishing her choked with one of the new candelabra; while Lady Juliana attempted to conceal her

laughter by pulling to pieces the myrtle in her bouquet.

But even Nancy's impertinence, and Brill's agonized discomfiture, were nothing in comparison with Lady Willersdale's amazement and the Miss Forsyths' dismay, when, after the repeated rounds of the champagne and hock, Lachryma Christi, Steinberger, Montrachet, and Schiraaz, Sir Thomas of Cheltenham's eloquence began to unfold!—His loud, coarse, untuneable voice, — the bray of his horrible laugh,—his slang jokes,—mail coach wit,—all savouring of cigars and top-boots, and "the ribbons," and "the tits," and "the knowing ones,"—appeared to enchant his malicious neighbour, who fooled him to the top of his bent by salvos of applause. Lord Mellerton, who now saw with regret the discomposure of the party, roused himself from his own lethargy, and attempted to drown the rude merriment of the Cheltenhamite by an excellent story, which he improvisated to Lady Willersdale with so much humour as to fix the entire attention of the lower end of the table; while Charlotte attempted a

cross fire, in French, with Auta Nauta, in order to distract the notice of the upper ward. Even Florence discovered that something was amiss, and exerted herself to spare poor Lucy's blushes, by all the *on dits* she could remember from the small talk of her partners of the preceding night.

But why dilate upon the minute distresses of a good meeting thus marred "with most admired disorder?"—The ill-assorted and embarrassed party looked anxiously for the close of their costly repast. They were too thoroughly *gêné* to observe whether the ice were hot or cold—the jellies sweet or sour;—all rejoiced when the coffee and the carriages arrived; and Mr. Forsyth retired to bed with the head-ache, and the satisfactory remembrance that he had worried himself, and bored fifteen innocent individuals to the amount of 2,432*l.* 16*s.* 9*d.* Rundell and Bridge included.

"*Voilà des gens qui devroient se contenter de rôti et de bifteck,*" soliloquized Ude as he pocketed his fractional checque. "*A quoi bon prodiguer son art à des bourgeois qui n'y connoissent rien? Cette Harlie Strit, ma foi!*

c'est le quartier du Marais de la ville de Londres;—un siècle en retard."

Poor Lucy and Charlotte, persuaded that their hopes of Almack's for the season, either with Lady Willersdale or the Marchioness, were utterly lost through the conviction of having such a cousin, and such a cousin's brother-in-law, wept themselves to sleep; and were only consoled by the perusal of the following paragraph, (which had been sent to the office in the course of the preceding week,) in the consolatory columns of the mild Morning Post.

"Mr. Forsyth, M. P. for the borough of Catspaw, gave a splendid entertainment on Saturday last to a select party of friends; among whom were Lord and Lady Willersdale, and the Hon. Miss Dudley; the Marquis and Marchioness of C.; Lady Juliana C.; the Duke of ———; Sir William and Lady de Hauteville; Lord C., Lady Mordaunt, &c. &c. &c. The banquet consisted of every delicacy in or out of season."

But, alas!—alas!—early in the next week, arrived a letter from Mrs. Willis Clinton, inclos-

ing a Sunday opposition paper, "of whose libellous proprietor, she earnestly trusted, her uncle would make a legal example;" and in which the following paragraph was especially scored out for his notice, and the gratification of his daughters.

"*PLACE-HUNTING EXTRAORDINARY.*

"We beg to call the attention of the worthy and independent electors of Catspaw to a paragraph in the 'never-sufficiently-to-be-despised, and altogether-to-be-mistrusted,' Morning Post. We understand they have at present the honour of being represented by a respectable man, of the name of Forsyth; of the firm, we presume, of Forsyth and Son, slopsellers, in the Barbican; who appears to be both hospitable, and vain of his hospitality. Like other pompous worthies, he advertises his dinners. And who, —tell it not in Catspaw—who, think you, my worthy and independent electors, graced, or *are said* to have graced, the banquet of this illustrious individual on Saturday se'nnight? My Lord and my Lady Willersdale! (*the head and front of our present corrupt ministry!*) the

Marquis and Marchioness of C.,—(*lord-lieutenant, lord of the bedchamber, lord of a starving tenantry, and master of his Majesty's —— on a salary of five thousand per annum!*) Sir William de Hauteville!—(*the prime mover of the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act, and every other arbitrary measure which has infringed on the rights of the people for the last twenty years.*) *Prince Auta Nauta,* (an out and outer?) My Lord ——. But we are sick of the soul-harrowing recapitulation. There can be little doubt that the eyes of the sycophantic slopseller are fixed on some snug sinecure; and we presume to recommend that those of the worthy and independent electors of Catspaw will keep an equally vigilant watch upon the movements of their representative. A word to the wise!"—

Had fate wreaked her worst vengeance on the house of Forsyth?—had they yet paid a sufficient penalty for the vaulting ambition of their dinner of court-cards? By no means!—A far more fatal retribution was yet in store.

Prince Anatolius Auta Nauta, whose gloating eyes had fixed themselves during the gene-

neral *mésintelligence* of the party upon the candelabra and *suite*, and who desired no nobler father-in-law, than a man who poached his eggs after the formula for *œufs pochés* in the *Cuisinier Impérial*, which commences "*Mettez douze canards à la broche*," beheld fair Lucy's image in the plate; followed her from ball to ball, galopaded, waltzed, tourbilloned, grandpered himself into her good graces; —talked to her of his vassals, his vineyards, his victories—in love and war. In the course of ten days, poor Lucy had refused William Daly, as "only the son of Lord Willersdale's agent;" in the course of twenty she had accepted Prince Anatolius Auta Nauta; and a *trousseau*, coronetted at every corner whose lawn, cambric, or muslin, could be compelled to bear such an appendage, was already in progress.—Unhappy house of Forsyth!

CHAPTER XI.

Love!—I abjure it—'tis a cloying dainty
Unmeet for daily fare! Give me the joys
Springing profuse from wealth and eminence,
And gilding o'er the paths of common life;
Give me the tangible delights which last
When Cupid's torch hath blackened into ashes,
And I'll endure to hear of priests and altars,
But prate no more of Love. *Fletcher.*

One of the subordinate incidents of the Harley Street dinner which had impressed itself the most disagreeably on Lady Willersdale's memory, was her discovery that the Forsyth family had persuaded Lady Mordaunt to attend the ensuing drawing-room, which was appointed for the following Thursday, in order to present her "daughter Mrs. James Montagu Forsyth, on her marriage."

A similar catastrophe, in fact, was in store for Helen herself; and it had been already

settled by Lord Willersdale, that his cousin the Duchess of Castleton, should undertake the presentation of so distinguished a bride. The new carriage, the silver lama, the bouquets of orange flowers, were all in perfect readiness; and Lady Willersdale naturally looked forward with pride and pleasure to an event publicly placing her among the highest ranks of the honoured and the illustrious; the duchess herself, whose daughters were yet children, having expressed the most amiable gratification in the office proposed to her.

But it now occurred to Helen that it would be only a becoming mark of respect towards her own mother, were she to claim this service at her hands. Regarding Lady Mordaunt less through the manner in which she had practised or neglected her maternal duties, than in the sacred character bestowed by nature, and sanctified by the canons of our religious faith, she would not permit herself, even in a trifling instance, to evince the slightest indifference to her feelings. Lord Willersdale, however vexed by the intended change, for a personal dislike of his worldly mother-in-law was mingled with the

suggestions urged by the pride and frailty of human nature, readily assented to every reasonable desire expressed by his beautiful wife; and the Duchess of Castleton, who was delighted by what she considered as an amiable trait in her young relative, replied to her excuses for this seeming caprice, by an expression of thanks that she had preferred *her* to every one *except a mother*.

Meanwhile, Lady Mordaunt was *au comble de ses voeux!* She assisted *con amore* in the cleaning up of her old-fashioned diamonds, and no longer regretted the eight and sixpence per yard which, even at Compton House, had been extorted for her satin train. And when Thursday really arrived, and with poor Jane and her salts-bottle, (looking like a marigold in full bloom), she drove up to her door in Hamilton Place—when she saw the Willersdale equipage, with its trappings, and nosegays, and attendant Gogs and Magogs, and felt that the Forsyths' carriage which she occupied for the occasion, nearly ventured to rival these aristocratic dignities,—when she heard the shouts of the gaping crowd on the appearance of Lord

Willersdale and his star, and Lady Willersdale and her blaze of beauty and jewels, looking like the queen of Cythera, in a French ballet—she was obliged to have recourse to her fan to repress her swelling pride. "Oh! Jane, Jane," she exclaimed, to Mrs. Montagu, who sat trembling lest their blood horses should resent the loud huzzas of the populace—"Oh! my dear Jane!—if your sister Lilfield could but see us *now!*"—

Hitherto, in truth, Lady Mordaunt had been piqued by the consciousness that Helen's extraordinary elevation had emancipated her more than the other married daughters of the family, from Mordauntic influence. Fern Wood, and Beech Park, and Wilton Crescent, were open to the levy of fines, and the imposition of divers little maternal taxes; but she felt that Lord Willersdale, and Lord Willersdale's wife, were above the pains and penalties of family vassalage. But all was now repaid; Lady Willersdale—"*the wife of the prime minister*, presented by her mother, Lady Mordaunt," was a receipt in full for every previous mortification. Her croaking neighbours of the marshes, her

superannuated father, her Durham daughter, and senatorial son and heir—all on the morrow must recognize the flattering fact. Why,—why was Sir Stephen Mordaunt detained by his gout, and his rustic bailiff from a participation in her triumph?—

Meanwhile Miss Dudley, who had judiciously resisted all Lord and Lady Willersdale's eager solicitations, that she should accompany them to the drawing-room, having assisted at Helen's splendid toilet, and rejoiced in its exquisite effect with the humble zeal of Cinderella ministering to the pride of her sisters, beheld the gorgeous equipage roll away without a sigh, and quietly addressed herself to her usual morning occupations. Her task immediately on hand was a miniature copy, destined for Lady Theodosia Mitford, of a magnificent portrait of Lady Willersdale from the easel of Sir Thomas Lawrence. Seduced from his ordinary mode of art by the unprecedented loveliness of his subject, the president had pourtrayed the fair and youthful Helen in the character of Aurora, shaking pearls from her dishevelled hair; a sort of pendant to his

graceful representation of Lady De Tabley, as Spencer's Hope. Nothing could exceed the brilliant elegance of the countenance!—instinct with that poetic idealism, which the genius of Lawrence can alone impart to a portrait, without destroying its almost vital individuality.

Engrossed by the interest of an employment which called forth the warmest excitement, both in the artist and the friend, Florence started with amazement, as she moved to seek a fallen brush, on perceiving that Lord Forreston was standing behind her.

"Thank you for your pre-occupation," said he, without apology for his intrusion; "it has enabled me to watch your labours, and to contemplate yonder exquisite effort of art at my leisure."

"To-morrow it goes to Somerset House."

"*Tant pis;* were it mine, it should be enshrined in some holiest sanctuary; not exposed to the coarse gaze of a vile mob, to the *grossiertés de la canaille animalâtre.*"

"Pardon me, I should as soon think of regretting that those two thousand illustrious persons called the world, are at this moment

permitted to look upon Lady Willersdale's living loveliness. Why are you not amongst the number?"

"With your permission I will wait here till her return, for I must not lose so public a pleasure. I do not feel that unmarried men have any business at the drawing-room; a quarter of an hour's intrusion at the levée, suffices to prove our respect to the sovereign. *Aussi je m'en contente; il ne faut pas être accapareur.* And now let me echo your question? why are *you* not there yourself?"

"You have very little idea how small are my pretensions to such an honour. Some day, when you find out what a very tiny nobody I really am, you will shudder at the remembrance of your own condescension."

"Without anticipating any such contingency, let me at least applaud your resolution. You are quite right to keep yourself above the crowd of manœuvring, bustling, self-asserting misses. For my own part, I hold with the French court, that unmarried women, unless belonging to some royal household, have no business to brave the publicity of the drawing-

room. Let them wait till they have a decided position in the world. And now, pray tell me who is to be the happy possessor of the little piece of ivory under your hand, honoured as it is by such a combination of attractions."

"A very dear friend of mine."

"Whose name you will not disclose?"

"Only because she is no very dear friend of yours;—Lady Theodosia Mitford."

"Ha! my Galway cousin's wife! Has she been long an acquaintance of yours?"

"My first, and last, and best. I may almost call myself her child and pupil, for I have been chiefly brought up under her care."

"In Ireland?"

"It is only a few weeks since I left the banks of Shannon for the first time; as my brogue must have forewarned you. Lady Theodosia and the Willersdales are near neighbours and close friends."

"That I never should have connected all these circumstances before!" exclaimed Lord Forreston, rising, and traversing the room. "*You* then," he continued, approaching Miss

Dudley with a smile, "You then are after all the secret enemy of my expectations, who has been exalting poor Lady Gertrude Wentworth's imagination touching some raw savage of a Connaught nephew;—some young Mitford, whom she threatens me with, unless I marry before Midsummer-day!—I shall duly note down my various obligations to you."

"*Tant que vous voudrez!* for if I succeed, I will gladly endure the detestation of all England, and half Ireland."

"You *shall* endure?" said Lord Forreston laughing.

"No—*will*—decidedly will; the case is one of most absolute volition."

"Indeed!—and what, if I may venture to inquire, is your own stake in the hazard?"

"The future comfort of Lady Theodosia, and the happiness of Harry Mitford; both of which are essential to my own."

"This is a day of discoveries;—*en effet vous m'en contez!* And so you really intend to exert your influence with Lady Gertrude, in order to despoil me of my heritage."

"To despoil?—oh no! only to share—to *divide* it with one whose claims of kindred appear to equal your own."

"And with whom,—forgive my presumption Miss Dudley,—with whom, you yourself purpose to *sub*-divide it hereafter. My cousin is so fortunate, I conclude, as to boast a peculiar interest in your affections."

"I have, however, no such intention," replied Florence calmly, and without discontinuing her occupation, "simply because I have no such *hope*.—As I am aware that you may possess yourself of the whole truth by a single inquiry of Lady Isabella Vyvyan, it will be no great stretch of frankness to inform you that I was for many years engaged in hand and heart to Henry Mitford. My hand is now free; if free I can call that which his possession of my truest affection will forbid me to bestow upon any other living man. And now, my Lord, after this very candid exposure of my feelings and my views, suffer me in turn to request that the subject may never be renewed between us."

Lord Forreston was actually startled by a degree of *naïveté* so new to his experience; he

was surprised, and in some measure displeased. What could Miss Dudley intend by this strange confidence; was she anxious to forewarn him, for his own sake, that her heart was pre-engaged?—Alas! it little needed! Excepting as a beautiful girl who, in the event of some illustrious marriage, might form a future acquaintance and future *object*, Florence exerted no influence upon his feelings. He admired her beauty, was astonished by her varied talents, and recognized in her mind a striking character of purity and elevation. But his heart was elsewhere.

A thundering tumult now announced Lady Willersdale's return, and when she flew into the library, careless of her encumbering finery, and totally unconscious of the presence of a third person, Lord Forreston felt in gazing upon her animated and elegant loveliness, that he had never beheld so beautiful a creature. Lord Willersdale, who followed her in order to gratify her partial friend by an assurance that their Helen had been more graciously received, and more generally admired than any other woman at the drawing-room, appeared very

much struck on finding Forreston so quietly domesticated by the side of Florence. A new view of the case seemed to enlighten his mind, as he stood in apparent admiration of the exquisite delicacy of truth with which she had copied the resemblance of his wife.

"We are going to Holly Wood for the holidays early next week," he observed to Lord Forreston, after some comments upon Miss Dudley's performance, rather complimentary than critical. "If you happen to be disengaged, perhaps you will join the party. A few of my colleagues come down to us for a day or two, but that need not alarm you; for Lady Willersdale has promised to neutralize our solemn dulness by the presence of some of her gayer friends. I hear whispers between her and Lady Isabella Vyvyan of French plays, and proverbs, and divers other laborious efforts of liveliness."

"Unfortunately—*most* unfortunately, I have already engaged myself at Rosemount for the week; but if you will permit me to attempt a compromise with Lady Alberville for half the

time, I shall be only too happy to avail myself of your invitation."

"Do not think of it," said Florence, laughing at his earnestness. "Although the days of Mrs. Turner and La Brinvilliers are past, prussic acid or arsenic may yet be introduced into an ice or a *macédoine;* and as we have already pilfered Lord Mellerton and Lord Bernard Neville from the Rosemount party, we cannot hope to escape Lady Alberville's vengeance."

"I shall now expect you as a matter of course, Forreston," rejoined Lord Willersdale. "A young lady's opposition in such a case is the most suspicious and most inviting thing in the world."

Florence Dudley, redeemed from any embarrassment that might have arisen from this insinuation by the remembrance of her recent confession, looked towards Lord Forreston with an air of good intelligence, confirming the Willersdales in their previous suspicion that some satisfactory explanation had arisen from their *tête-à-tête.* "Well then," said she, "we

must contrive to make Lord Bernard your substitute for the occasion. We will persuade him that Rosemount is the scene of *his* engagements; or perhaps—for he is really very persuadeable—that he actually represents, or *is* Lord Forreston:—he will scorn to take the trouble of disputing about his own identity."

"For the love of every thing that is charitable," exclaimed Lady Isabella Vyvyan, who now tottered into the room in her *habit de cour*, while Forreston profited by her *entrée* to make his escape, "give me to drink mandragora, and to sit in a comfortable *bergère*,—for I am tired and exhausted beyond the reach of patience."

"I should scarcely have imagined it," said Lord Willersdale, courteously surrounding her with cushions and footstools, while he admired the *petit air coquet* imparted to her figure by one of Herbaut's choicest combinations of *marabouts* and *plumes de héron*. "Believe me, Lady Isabella, your looks are still as brilliant as those beautiful *bouquets* of sumach-blossom which were the admiration of the whole drawing-room."

"*Chut—chut—chut!* there was not one

among you, except a boy or two of the *corps diplomatique*, who had the discernment to know that I was the only tolerably dressed woman present. As to Lady Willersdale, with her beauty and her diamonds, *elle peut se passer de toilette;* and as to myself, I intend in future to profit by the counsels of my friend the * * * * * ambassadress. '*Je fais mes économies à Londres, m'a t'elle dit. A Paris il me faut mes toilettes de saison et de demie-saison; ici, au contraire, je porte ma robe de velours toute l'année, et vos Anglaises n'en sont pas plus avancées.*' Well, Flo!—what do you think of me?—*ai-je bonne mine?—comme ça?*—is that all?—you are envious, child—you are envious. *N'importe!* your own turn is coming."

"You look very like the spoiled princess of some fairy godmother;" said Florence, not choosing to flatter her little ladyship by the true expression of her perfect approbation.

"My dear Lady Willersdale, how long do you mean to martyrize yourself by the endurance of that hearse-like plume?"

"Only till you have rested yourself sufficiently to venture with me to my dressing-room."

"My good Lord—*you* who I am told are as absolute in the land as Alexander the Autocrat, take pity on us all, and get an act passed against annual drawing-rooms, and court heads! I assure you it is a barbarism to die of, to stand for hours exposed to the suffocation and the compression of a well-dressed mob. If you did but know how much better we manage these things in Paris!—with how much less Tom Thumbery."

"The Parisians, however, paid somewhat dearly for the abrogation of court etiquette; and I think your ladyship will allow that St. James's and Old Buckingham House have hitherto afforded little temptation for a resident court. We erred in making our palaces a penance to the sovereign; and his majesty had a good right to revenge himself by the infliction of an annual drawing-room. *Mais nous avons changé tout cela;* and I, meanwhile will go and change my dress. Vyvyan joins us at dinner, I trust?"

"*Sans faute.* Lady Willersdale has obliged me by allowing my maid to meet me here, that I might escape a second parade and review

before Sir Simon and his household. I heard him give a *rendezvous* to his apothecary and the curate of the parish, that they might 'see Lady Isabella in her gimcracks after the drawing-room.' Thank providence and you, I have escaped. Come Flo!—give me your arm;—Lady Willersdale, I wait your piloting towards Mademoiselle Florentine's temple of the graces."

During the elaborate process of splendid disrobement that ensued, Miss Dudley, who had a ball in store for the evening, seized the opportunity to refresh herself by a solitary walk in the Apsley garden, commanded by the mansions in Hamilton Place; and Helen, after dismissing the two French maids, profited by her absence to disclose to Lady Isabella her suspicions touching Lord Forreston. "I am persuaded," said she in conclusion, "that had not Vernon opened the door with his usual pomposity, we should have surprised Forreston on our return in all the tender agonies of his proposal."

"But not of his acceptance; I cannot hear of such a thing."

"Willersdale is of my opinion; or he never would have invited Lord Forreston, who is no great favourite of his, to Holly Wood?"

"And are we to have the honour of his sublime patronage? *Ah! tant mieux!* I shall then make my own observations. But I forewarn you that I am true to Harry, and shall do my worst."

"You will not—unless you are demented altogether. Now can you, in any conscience—you—who know how to value the comforts and pleasures of life—*can* you wish our dear Florence to join the goodly company of repining women, who have sacrificed their reason and happiness to the ignis fatuus of a love match?"

"By no means! I am, as you say, one of those who prefer the daily cake of life to its daily bread; but even the sweetest *sucrerie* may be bought too dear. A *mariage de convenance* is to be tolerated where there exists no previous attachment to endanger its duties; yourself, for instance, who put on your coronet in a bib and tucker, having seen nobody but the family chaplain—yourself I regard as a model of domestic happiness and good fortune. But

Florence is, or has been, too strongly attached to another to unite herself to Lord Forreston with impunity."

"Yet surely his intellectual qualifications, his elegance of mind and manners, assimilate far better with those of the grave Florence, than Mr. Mitford's; who appeared to me a frank, blunt, good-humoured soldier, such as I remember my brother John in his youth;—a person whom I should as soon expect would attract the attention of Flo as——"

"*Est on plus entêtée!*—are you ignorant of the charm of contrast? Do you not know that Lord Willersdale, after a morning of finance, or a boring debate, finds your details of Almack's a considerable relief?—One gets tired of oneself and one's likeness; had I been a blue, I would have married a dunce—*pour m'échapper.* I almost wish I were a bishop's wife, to get rid of *myself* sometimes; for when Vyvyan and I meet after our morning separation, we have only the same dull round of interest to recount;—his tailor's bulletins—my milliners decrees;—club-gossip, and boudoir-scandal! Think how *excédé* Lord Willersdale would be, for

example, by Theodosia's unchanging rationality; for I look upon *her* to be a Willersdale in petticoats. I always long to address her as Louis XIV. did Madame de Maintenon, '*Votre solidité!*'"

"I can now understand why you discouraged Lord Barton's addresses to Florence; you thought them both too argumentative and solemn."

"Oh! Barton is the most ratiocinacious being that ever bestowed its tediousness on mortal ears; they would have logicated themselves into insufferable boredom. And as to William Daly, who always begins his sentences with an adverb, like one of Johnson's pompous periods,—Florence would have stagnated into a black letter and a dead letter, if she had married such a literary log. No! no! Henry Mitford suits her best; he will bring her down from the skies when she affects to be too etherial; and rouse her when she is indolent."

"I had rather see her doing the honours of Forreston Park than living in a dirty barrack-room; with a legion of little cherubim in greasy pinafores."

"Let us look forward to a happy medium, for Theodosia's sake; *she* deserves some compensation for a life of self-denial, and I cannot desert a cause which involves the best hopes of her future existence. And now tell me—who we are to have at Holly Wood; have you despatched dinner-cards to my two *attachés* —*sans cela*, no proverbs; and how will your ministerial grandiosities endure our pastimes and follies?"

"Have you not just been pleading the charms of contrast? Depend on it they will not find us too gay; I always regard them as boys let loose from school."

"I am glad you have not invited Barton; he would have prosed us to extinction with his remonstrances against profane playacting; and proved a mere *gâte-fête*. I look upon my brother's society in the light of the Humane Society's Board, which is stuck up in one of the most agreeable spots in the Park to remind us of our mortality, lest we should be too happy. And how did you manage to escape having Lady Mordaunt, and that Armadillo brother-in-law of yours?"

"By no effort of mine; my presentation this morning must have proved to you that I consult my mother's feelings more than my own inclinations. But she is going down to my father at Mordaunt; and the Forsyths fortunately monopolize Jane and her automaton. Easter, like Christmas, is a sort of domestic crisis in England when *ad ogni uccello suo nido è bello.*"

Meanwhile Lord Forreston was busied in inditing to Lady Alberville one of those little equivocating flattering billets, whose *odeur ambrée*, and Parisian elegance of diction generally contrived to leave her in delusion as to the real feelings and intentions of the writer. He expressed however, as peremptorily as the most varnished courtesy would permit, his determination to remain three days instead of seven at Rosemount; and however vexed and piqued, he was aware that she must quietly submit to the decree; for what could avail murmurs or female opposition, when addressed to the sole lord and sovereign of the *beau monde*,—and of her own susceptible heart!

But although he was deeply flattered by Lord

Willersdale's invitation, and excited by the prospects of pleasure it seemed to unfold, Miss Dudley's extraordinary mode of throwing a gauntlet of defiance at his feet, still rankled in his bosom. While the hands of Vitivert, his accomplished valet, were busied in preparing his raven locks for a dinner at ——— House, he could not but recur to the impertinent candour with which she had appeared resolved to forestal the possibility of his addresses; a candour which he unconsciously qualified in an audible murmur, as "Irish impudence."

"*Ah! Milor—que vous avez raison!*" ejaculated Vitivert, eagerly availing himself of the cue. "*Peut on rien concevoir de plus mauvais ton que ces insulaires là! Par exemple,—ce Bill qu'ils ont voulu pousser, il y a deux ans, jusqu' à la barbe même de sa Majesté;—comme si la chambre des Deputés n'avoit que faire que de règler les consciences et les prétensions d'une nation tributaire, composée de gueux et d'imbéciles! Il faut avouer Milor que ces Irlandois sont d'une témérite à faire hausser les épaules.*"

"*Et d'une impertinence—à ce qui me semble —que tu songes à égaler. Ah ça, mon ami,*

donne moi mon habit au collet montant, et mon gilet pellerin ; et désormais qu'il ne soit plus question de tes avis politiques. C'est un métier qui ne te regarde pas, et où il y a déjà trop de concurrens. Allons, fais avancer la voiture."

CHAPTER VII.

Piaggia, ch' ascolti sue dolci parole,
E del bel piede alcun vestigio serbe;
Schietti arboscelli, e verdi frondi acerbe,
Amorosette e pallide viole;
Ombrose selve, ove percote il sole,
Che vi fa co' suoi raggi alte e superbe;
O soave contrada!—O puro fiume!
Che bagni suo bel viso e gli occhi chiari,
E prendi qualità dal vivo lume, ——
Quanto v' invidio gli atti onesti e cari!

Petrarca.

The Easter of that memorable year was a season of the most auspicious sweetness. Nature woke out of her sleep at the call of Spring, with the same playful, happy smile that irradiates the face of childhood after a series of delightful dreams and undisturbed repose; and Holly Wood presented to the weary denizens escaped from sulphuric London, a breath all violets, and an aspect all sunshine. There are

few moments of the year when the climate of England is more balmily soft than during those last days of the month of April, when we presume once more to seat ourselves in the open air to watch the expanding buds, among which the birds are darting unconcealed from bough to bough, and clamouring as if in reproval of their tardy reverduration.

Lady Willersdale was enchanted on perceiving that since her last disastrous visit to the villa, its conservatories had been increased by a magnificent collection of exotics, and its shrubberies enlivened by several fountains of Italian marble, secured, by her Lord's interposition, at the sale which had recently taken place at Burwood. The decorations of the mansion itself were also now completed; and it presented that perfection of villa refinement which, as was ill-naturedly said of the Burlington *bijou* at Chiswick, rendered it "too small to inhabit, and too large to append to a watchchain."

On occasions so momentous as Easter holidays, however, villas will *stretch* as marvellously as the conscience and the purse of a bribed patriot, or the recitals of a professed *raconteur*,

after the third glass of Verzenay; and Vernon had contrived to enshrine within the minute temple of elegance, the Vyvyans, the Duke and Duchess of Castleton, Lord Bernard and Lord Mellerton (the two Gentlemen of Verona,) Sir Wollaston Dotterel (of the Woods and Forests,) Lord de Quensey (the President of the Board of Fudge!) besides Lord and Lady Anne Gardner, near relations of the Willersdale family. One of these official dignitaries was expected to vacate his seat previous to the promised visit of Lord Forreston.

It was not, however, from these domestic resources that Lady Isabella was content to gather the materials of audience for their little theatre. The Prince de Bellune and the young Count Amédée de Luxembourg, who were staying at the mansion of their ambassador on the borders of Richmond Park, had promised to dine at Holly Wood on two successive days; Lord Altamont and his four daughters,—a nest of nightingales, whose strains were at the service of the slightest invitation, were the inhabitants of a neighbouring villa; and Richmond and Roehampton, Ham and Wimbledon,—the patrician

head-quarters of the *bureaucratie*,—had already engaged to contribute their splendid quota towards both the drama and its spectators. Even Lady Alberville was too deeply intent on watching the movements and ascertaining the views of Lord Forreston, to maintain a war of rivalship; and had gratefully accepted the Willersdales' invitation to bring herself and her whole coterie on the Monday, to applaud the efforts of the Holly-Wood theatricals.

"And who do you imagine is among the *élégants* at Rosemount?" inquired Lady Isabella of the circle which surrounded the work-table the morning after their arrival, enjoying the busy idleness of embroidery and *tricotage* and bead-work, in a saloon opening into the blossomed fragrance of a vast conservatory,—enlivened by the music of a thousand birds, and of a twinkling fountain, whose golden carp were suffering considerable alarm under the zoological investigations of little Algernon:—"What think you, Lady Willersdale, of William Daly! Did I not predict that the Connaught Alberoni would advance with rapid strides into distinction?—did not I tell you that

his inflation and rise would rival that of a balloon?"

"Like a balloon, however, he appears to be exposed to many varying gusts. I am assured that he has been refused by one of those pretty Forsyths."

"Whose two thousand a-year he thought would make a *joli apanage de sêcrétaire?* I wish him joy of the negative; *car il ira plus loin.*"

"I took him with me one night to Lady Alberville's; but it appeared to me that he was not successful in her set."

"You presented him no doubt as a mere Mr. Daly,—or as a secretary of Lord Willersdale's—bad credentials to an exclusive and a wit. But he persuaded Lord Brading—one of the epic Lords, a great cultivator of bays, and patron of conversazione-genius—to *proner* him as a poet or an *érudit*, or a learned horror of some hybrid species,—*et depuis cette annonce voilà la belle Alberville qui en raffole!*"

"Oh! depend on it he is the mysterious unknown, who wrote some lines on her picture," cried Lady Anne Gardner. "I remember

Lord Mellerton bringing them to us, and saying they were a dinner-trap, or a ball-trap. I dance with that Mr. Daly sometimes, and he is an awful bore, besides being a mere detrimental;—Theodosius Brill says his father is only a vulgar Irish attorney. Besides, he is always talking of the temples of Pæstum, or the beauties of the Rhine, or some of those hack poeticisms; and his *galopade* is very much like the strut of an ostrich. I dare say he will soon be on the list of Lady Alberville's cast-off *engouements*."

"And then," resumed Lady Isabella, whose Parisian experience decided that this *tirade* was too long and too presumptuous for the lips of a young lady, "then she has Wilmington and Melbourne, who arrived from Italy only a day or two ago, and are novelties at present."

"And Mr. Brill," said Lady Anne.

"And Mr. Brill—earning his holiday livelihood by the manufacture of epigrams, which, like Anna Boleyn's axe, prove fatal to their victim through their ponderous weight rather than through the keenness of their edge."

"And that laughing hyena, spiteful Mrs.

Beaumont; and *la belle au bois dormant*, dear lazy, dozy, yawny, Lady Christina de Burgh; and her friend the Baroness wild after *ecarté*."

"How fortunate you are Lady Willersdale," interrupted the Duchess of Castleton, who was too well bred, and too femininely gentle to enjoy this personal tone of conversation, "to live in a century when flowers are admitted among the domestic luxuries of a country house. How delicious to sit here enjoying the sight of those heaths, and the scent of those heliotropes without having to toil, after the fashion of our ancestors, across a park towards a garden enclosed within brick walls, and adorned by a pompous greenhouse, too dark to give lustre to the sickly flowers."

"The exact plan of the Mordaunt gardens!" said Lady Willersdale. "I imagine that the ladies of the last century, with their hoops and high-heeled shoes, and powdered hair, took but small delight in rural pleasures;—a dry and well-screened gravel walk suited their toilets far better than the breezy lawns we love to decorate."

"Unhappily for me," observed the Duchess, "Castleton Court is one of those formal pieces of antiquity which would be utterly disfigured by any thing like a modern innovation. Castleton says that a conservatory tacked on to the house would look like the ancient marble sphinxes, with little modern coquettish gypsey hats, which decorate the gates of some villa near Paris; and during the six months of my country life, I cannot get sight of even a hollyhock, without ordering a pony-chaise to drive to the gardens."

"London really teaches one the value of a flower," said Lady Isabella. "In Paris, thanks to the gardens both public and private, one can almost forget the country. But in your sooty wilderness, even those mansions which boast an adjoining morsel of earth, can raise nothing more attractive than a few negro lilac-trees emulating the brushes of the chimney-sweeps."

"I fear I have lived too much in the country," said Helen, "to be very eager after its pleasures."

"We generally assign the force of rural habits as a reason for disliking London."

"But it is possible to have lived in the country without having been indulged in *rural* habits. My sisters and myself were accustomed to walk with our governess, at a given hour, in an appointed spot; we had our summer and our winter stations, varied only by an occasional forced march through the gardens. Oh! it was all odious!—and I remember thinking the liberties of Grosvenor Square a picturesque spot by comparison."

"But how infinitely you used to enjoy your drives and walks about Willersdale," said Miss Dudley gravely.

"I enjoyed *your* society, dear Florence; but I like it as well in Kensington Gardens, and much *better* in the shrubberies here at Holly Wood. I own I prefer men and women to trees and rivers;—which are rather the consolations than the charms of solitude."

The conversation was now interrupted by the arrival of the gentlemen from the library, and the billiard room, and the stables; luncheon was to be discussed, and the amusements of the morning to be arranged. Miss Dudley insisted upon Lady Isabella's accepting the use of the horse kept for

herself; and Lady Anne, having undertaken Lady Willersdale's favourite mare, they agreed to accompany the Solemnities to leave their names at Bushy Park, attended by the two young lords; while Helen and Florence were to become the companions of the duchess in the britschka.

The weather was most propitious to their excursion; and as they drove through some of the wooded lanes of Petersham, and saw the wild flowers bursting in profusion beneath the budding hedges, and even the moss upon the venerable trunks of the towering elms, freshened and revived by the penetrating glances of a genial sun, they felt that nature was alive again—calling upon them to be happy, and to be thankful. The duchess expressed a regret that her children were prevented enjoying the invigorating breath of the country in their native North. "We have no house," she said, "nearer than Yorkshire; and I do not attempt to persuade Castleton to grant us the luxury of a villa, for we have already three family places to be kept up, which would of course become the sufferers by such an additional indulgence."

Lady Willersdale, who was the worst financier

in the world, and whose slightest wishes on such subjects were guessed and forestalled by the lavish tenderness of her husband, could by no means understand the parsimony of *a Duke* on a point she considered so essential to London comfort. She had still to learn the peremptory restraint of a numerous offspring, and unimprovable income. "You might surely have brought me one or two of your little girls," said she. "Lady Isabella has been less scrupulous; and you saw how intensely little Algernon enjoyed the prospect of his gallop in the Park."

"He would, however, have been better at home, for our sakes, and his own, and those of the gold fish in your conservatory. He will be an incumbrance on the riding party; for parents who are the first to introduce their spoiled children into society beyond their age and powers, are also the first to transfer the annoyance they occasion to the rest of the company. Depend upon it, our friend Mr. Vyvyan will ride off with Lord de Quensy, or any other amusing person he may encounter, and leave the control of his riotous boy to those who have no authority for his restrainment."

"It has been said by Hannah More or some other educationist," observed Florence, "that this is the golden age of children;—that they are made the first objects of the present day."

"And why? Because the excellent counsels of Hannah More, and others, have rendered mothers *too* tender of their happiness, *too* exclusively devoted to domestic management," said Lady Willersdale.

"And as extremes meet, I conclude that our grand-children,—the progeny of the spoiled children who are brought up in the drawing-room and the theatre,—will be strictly re-committed to nursery durance," replied the duchess. "For my own part, I enjoy the presence of children;—like Mr. Burchell in the Vicar of Wakefield, I look upon them as 'harmless little men;' but I do not expect that people in general will endure the importunity of mine; while I have abundance of solitary leisure which they serve to enliven. I sometimes fancy I can detect by the mere aspect of a house, and by the tone of its master and mistress, whether they are refreshed and *rajeunis* by children; who, like flowers, form an ever-varying embellishment

imparting the strongest excitement to the heart and eye observant of their daily changes."

"But that eye must be a patient one, and that heart a virtuous," said Helen, with a sigh. "How many mothers do you see to whom, at a certain period of life, the existence of sons and daughters becomes an irksome incumbrance."

"Not *many*;—oh! no—not many, dearest Lady Willersdale. I am aware to whom you are recurring; to our relation Lady Danvers; and pray mark the retribution that has fallen on her maternal neglect! Her son, who is already pointed out as one of the most distinguished *roués* of the day, has refused to see her, or to afford any increase to the very limited provision assigned by her settlements; and her eldest daughter has married in open defiance of her mother's will. The other girls, whom I saw frequently when they were with their father at Hastings, are amiable, and thanks to a good governess, admirably educated;—and *their* destiny is indeed lamentable! Honoria's open defiance of the decencies of life on her arrival in Italy, caused all her own countrywomen to withdraw from her society; her health is gra-

dually failing under these mortifications; and sick, and poor, and remote from her own country and kindred, I learn from Mr. Melbourne that her violence and habitual peevishness have banished every charm and every grace—and with them the crowd of admirers in which alone she could endure existence. Think what a home she must afford to girls advancing into womanhood."

"This is the first time I have heard of her illness;" said Lady Willersdale with earnest sympathy; "and regarding her as prosperous and happy, I have been at no pains to repress my feelings of resentment towards her. I will write to her immediately;—I will entreat Willersdale to engage her to return to England."

"With her present means, and past habits, a residence here would only increase her vexations."

"But surely it will be no derogation to receive marks of affection and interest from her own brother? Willersdale is on the point of taking a larger house; she might share it, or live here at Richmond as she preferred."

"You are a good creature, my dearest cousin," said the duchess, touched by her eagerness, "for I am well aware that she has been much and maliciously your enemy. Do not let the world spoil you by its adulation; for we cannot spare so amiable a nature as yours to its corruptions."

Lady Willersdale, embarrassed by flattery, or rather *approval* so unexpected, attempted to change the subject, by interrogating Florence Dudley on some point relative to their intended theatricals.

"Why did you interrupt her grace," answered Florence with a tearful smile, "I was so happy in listening to expressions which brought Lady Theodosia Mitford full before my mind; and for the first time since I have lived in a London world."

"Lady Theodosia is an old and valued friend of mine," said the duchess; "and I am therefore enabled to thank you for a very welcome compliment. But pray tell me, am I to be favoured by admission to the rehearsal of this evening?"

"I was almost afraid of your condemnation," said Helen, with a slight blush. "Lady Isa-

bella assures me that with your strict views, you will regard our theatricals as a diversion—perhaps *un peu leste*."

"She does me grievous wrong," said the duchess, laughing. "Believe me, I am no rigid censor of other people's amusements.

> *My* Goddess of Pleasure is not, I trust,
> The reeling goddess with the zoneless waist;

neither is she girdled with a *cilice*, nor draperied with sackcloth. I am often diverted by hearing persons rail against the immodest display of private theatricals, who suffer their daughters to sing, or dance, or utter audible nonsense in every crowded room."

"Perhaps you might have been induced to take a part in our drama?"

"I am peculiarly unskilful in the art; but if you want a walking figure, or dumby servant, or promptress, pray command me. I have only two objections to private theatricals in general, both of which you have avoided—the introduction of professional assistants, which necessitates a degrading contact; and the admission of servants as spectators. *They* at

least should never be permitted to see us in a light calculated to diminish our artificial dignity in their eyes."

The splendid burst of landscape consequent on the attainment of Richmond Hill, now gave a different turn to their discourse; and having returned to Holly Wood in time to dress for dinner, and having overheard Count Vyvyan diligently rehearsing his part as they passed his dressing-room, a fresh supply of guests enlivened the saloon on their re-entrance.

The dinner was brilliant and faultless—whether in its service or colloquial tone. In the evening a promising rehearsal took place, which was followed by music, in honour of the singing birds of the house of Altamont; and the evening closed with a *petit souper*. The morrow being Sunday, the diversions of Holly Wood were limited to an excursion on the water; but the morrow's morrow was the day of days, consecrated to the opening of the theatre; and to the re-union of various persons who were perhaps only too anxious to find themselves once more together.

CHAPTER IX.

It was an excellent play; set down with as much modesty as cunning, and well digested in the scenes. If it live in your memory, begin—

Hamlet.

"My dearest Flo!" cried Lady Willersdale, as she was about to prepare herself for her morning's drive on the eventful day, "will you oblige me by remaining at home to receive some of the visitors, who will certainly arrive during my absence? I cannot allow the duchess to go alone to Hampton Court; nor shall we return till dinner time."

"With the greatest pleasure. I shall be glad of an opportunity to look over my part and yours; as I have engaged myself to become your promptress."

But no sooner had the joyous party driven

and ridden from the door, than Miss Dudley felt her intended diligence relax. She was oppressed by the exertions of the preceding days,—by the perpetual state of representation necessitated by villa existence,—by her thankless efforts to amuse the vapid, faded tribe of *ennuyés*, who are so utterly incapable of contributing to the maintenance of their own gaiety, or that of others. She could not but remind herself that she "had no part in them or theirs;" and that it were as idle to attach any degree of interest to the passing shadows of the fashionable hour, as to the summer's fugitive roses, or the evanescent and irrecallable tones of an Æolian harp. In the weariness of her spirits—and what so weary as the pauses consequent on over-excitement?—she sighed for her tranquil home; for the tenderness which, in its modest recesses, watched and applauded her every movement. She sighed for her guardian's fond admonitions,—for the mild counsels of Lady Theodosia—for the cordial, blunt, and animated encouragement of Lady Theodosia's nephew!

Urged by the restlessness unfailingly attendant

on discontent, Florence Dudley had wandered across the lawn towards the music-room; and throwing open its folding windows, she entered, with the intention of arranging the music-books for the evening, and remedying some of the disorder caused in every apartment of the house by the selfish thoughtlessness of Lady Anne Gardner. She perceived that a string was missing to the harp; and having in charity to the Altamont performers, applied herself to supply the defect, she tuned the instrument with careful assiduity, and threw her hand across the strings to determine the success of her labours. Insensibly the arpeggio became an accompaniment;—insensibly the accompaniment modified itself into that beautiful canzonet so exquisitely arranged by the late Mrs. Wolff,—the most gifted of our musical amateurs.

Forced to doat on thee
Thine own way—
I chide thee first
And then obey:—&c.

Impatience, or some interposing remembrance, caused her to pause abruptly in her song; when having turned towards the window to

resume her walk in the shrubbery, she was astonished by the sight—or was it the *vision* of Lord Forreston,—leaning against the entrance with a countenance distorted and convulsed by emotion. It was not tenderness,—it was no gentle feeling;—it was the quivering agony of remorse—it was the darkened horror of despair!

For a moment Florence believed herself to be deluded by the vague suggestions of her own fancy;—for as the figure became conscious of her approach, it darted away and was altogether lost among the shadowy cedars of the shrubbery. Although superior to fine-lady terrors, and on all occasions unusually insensible to the idle influence of over-wrought sensibilities, Florence involuntarily seated herself to recover her oppressed respiration; and at length having in some degree mastered her agitation, she rang for a servant, and applied herself to Vernon's information as to the possibility of Lord Forreston's arrival.

"His lordship has been here this half hour; I informed him, Madam, that you were alone in the music-room, and he commanded me not to interrupt you by announcing him."

Reassured, but still surprised and embarrassed, Miss Dudley bent her steps towards the river terrace with the view of refreshing herself by its breezes; and there,—traversing the fresh-mown turf with hasty footsteps,—she encountered the living object of her mysterious alarms. He moderated his pace on her approach; and greeted her with an extended hand, and friendly smile.

"Thank you for a degree of courtesy that relieves my worst apprehensions," said she laughing. "From the melodramatic expression of your countenance just now, I expected to find you dagger in hand, or——"

"I could wish that you had spared me any further allusion to the idle emotion of an idle moment," replied Lord Forreston, in a voice of displeasure. "But now that you have broken the ice, suffer me to ask you from whom you learnt or obtained the air I heard just now from your lips? It is uncommon—almost unknown—and through former associations, painfully dear to my feelings."

"From Oberon—or an Irish benshee—or the widowed echoes of——"

"Do not jest with me, Miss Dudley. But since you refuse to answer my question, oblige me by a still greater concession. Promise me that you will never repeat it again."

"In your hearing—never! But do not extend your prohibition to the dear home I shall, in a few months, return to inhabit. That song happens to be a peculiar favourite with my guardian; and there are very few evenings in which he does not require it from me!"

"Your guardian!—General Mitford I conclude?"

"The Mitfords are my kind friends and neighbours; but I live under the guardianship of Mr. Edwards, the rector of Willersville."

"An orphan I presume?" hesitated Lord Forreston.

"An orphan!" replied Florence. Then affecting a livelier tone, she continued: "Think how many dangers I must have incurred by a masculine education; I had only the alternative of becoming a pedant or a romp; and while I was hesitating between these fierce extremes, Lady Theodosia took pity on me,—taught me to

stitch and sing;—and all other authorized feminine accomplishments."

"And is this," inquired Lord Forreston, having now persuaded her to take shelter on the favourite seat overhung by the still unfoliaged beech-trees, "is this, may I ask, your first visit to England?"

"I thought I had already acknowledged," she replied, relieved by finding him thus reassume his usual tranquil tone, "that until a few weeks ago, I never left my native village."

"And how do you like us?—Doubtless your eremetical preceptor has instilled very antisocial precepts into your mind? Tell me candidly,—does not your philosophy teach you to regard us as a frivolous, contemptible race, very inferior to your Connaught associates?"—

"No; I find you all better bred, better informed, and more *ostensibly* considerate of the prejudices and failings or feelings of others than the generality of my Irish friends; but to own the truth, I do not like you half so well. I am more amused in London; but I am happier at Willersville. You have shown me *chef-d'œuvres* of art—instances of refinement—scenes of festal

enjoyment, such as my imagination could never have figured. But nature has her own treasury of glories. This river with its ornate villas, and banks tortured by factitious embellishments, cannot rival the animation of our Shannon. This shaven turf, however superior to that of the squares and parks of the metropolis, cannot measure with the thymy herbage of our Galway hills."

"I fear I have outgrown the age of enthusiasm for hills and vallies; after traversing Europe, and feeding our souls to repletion with the solitude of some of its sublimest scenery, we become *blasé* by the beauties of inanimate nature. But our *society*, Miss Dudley—our men and women?"

"Are delightful companions through the sunny hours of a life of pleasure; delightful fellow-combatants against *ennui*,—and conscience,—and other mental phantoms! Were one secure against old age, and secure against a higher responsibility, I could learn to content myself with such associates. But to all who have deeper apprehensions and better hopes, such society must, in time, become im-

portunate and distasteful in proportion to its peril. I should be sorry to find myself in the midst of you either in sickness or sorrow; I do not doubt it was in London that the decrepit king of the beasts was kicked to death. Yourself, my Lord, who now so courteously disguise your impatience of my common-place observations,—my *fadaises*,—nay, who almost succeed in affecting a degree of interest in my *maussade* and egotistical narration—you, who would have me believe you my friend, or at least a very indulgent acquaintance,—you will be the first to amuse Lady Alberville, or Lady Anne, or the Altamonts with your satirical comments on the faults of my performance this evening. In the course of the very first scene, you will whisper to Mr. Melbourne or some of his fastidious tribe: '*Conçoit-on l'insolence de jouer la comédie avec cet accent là!*"

"Ah! you are then one of the performers—and Lady Willersdale?"

"Our best,—in spite of the grace and practised art of Lady Isabella."

"I will so far concur in your strictures, as to confess that I do not particularly pique my-

self on what is *called* sincerity; I should as soon think of letting my beard and nails extend themselves like the pictures of those of Nebuchadnezzar, as of attempting to insult mankind with that nauseous draught—'the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.' Yet I will frankly own to you, that I am sorry to find Lady Willersdale and yourself among the theatrical group. I should regret to see you act too well; and I *shall* regret to find you act indifferently, which I am persuaded will be the case. All English women act ill—they are encumbered by their natural decency; and while we compare them with Mars, Vertpré, Colon, Léontine Fay or Malibran, we love them the more, that we admire them the less. But see—the party is returned: do not move; there is nothing so awkward as an air of surprise."

The equestrians and the Britschka party having met and joined forces, had contented themselves with a short excursion in Richmond Park; that they might prepare themselves for the fatigues of the evening. The greater number were now directing their steps among the flower-beds towards the terrace.

"Now pray admire Miss Dudley's *sang froid*, whispered Lady Anne Gardner to the duchess; "there she sits under the trees, coquetting in the most barefaced manner with Lord Forreston. I was sure she had some excellently good reason for staying at home; but I conclude, from all I hear and see, that it is a settled thing between them. Well! I should really like to know how she always manages to surround herself with the best men in London, and what they see to like in her;—her manners are extremely *brusque;* and Brill informs me she is nobody,—a sort of *dame de compagnie!*"—

"If you will gather up your habit,—with which you have demolished a beautiful cluster of gentianellas,—and give me that whip, which has already broken the stems of half a dozen hyacinths,—I will tell you. These *best men*—though I hardly know what you mean by the definition—have discernment enough to discover that Miss Dudley is beautiful, accomplished, intelligent, animated, amiable; and introduced, it matters not by what accident, into the first society. But this is not all, my dear Anne;—they see that she is wholly free from any young-

lady arts and designs, and that she is a perfect child of nature."

"Now, how very inconsistent you are! I remember, duchess, when I first came out last year, and was—*sauf votre respect moins formée au monde qu'aujourd hui*, you were always remonstrating with me against my wildness, and breaches of etiquette. You said, *then*, that 'a child of nature,' like other foolish children, deserved to be whipped into better behaviour."

"Because you over-acted your part;—for with *you*, it was acting. Good morning, Lord Forreston; are you justified in allowing Miss Dudley to sit so long in the open air without a shawl?"

While Forreston, with the most eager gallantry, was affecting to exculpate himself,—and while Florence, with good-natured interest, made inquiries of Lady Anne, as to the result and the pleasures of her ride, Lord Mellerton's joyous laugh announced the remainder of the party, which had been overtaken and joined by the Prince de Bellune and the Comte de Luxembourg. A piece of London news was the origin of their mirth; the rumour of an immediate

marriage between Prince Anatolius Auta Nauta, and the accomplished Miss Lucy Forsyth; and Lord Mellerton, who had no difficulty in tracing these illustrious hymeneals to their origin, could not but feel diverted on discovering how easily and how expeditiously the English-heiress-hunter had run down his game.

"Where does Auta Nauta come from?—Italy, or Hungary, or Poland,—or what other land of the *barbaresques*?—The Lievens told me they understood he was an Austrian; Princess Esterhazy said she concluded he was a Greek; the Neapolitan ambassador assured me he was either a Norwegian or a Silesian—*enfin je m'y perds!*" said Lady Isabella. "He once condescended to talk to me about Paris; and alluded to a period when, had he really been *de la société*, I must have met him there."

"I know he brought over very pressing letters of recommendation from Lady —— to Lady J——, who of course introduced him every where; and as he was immediately received at all the Embassies, it was difficult to decide on which his claims extend," said Lord Mellerton.

"*Je me suis toujours figuré que c'étoit quelque Altesse Tartare,*" observed the Comte de Luxembourg, "*car il m'a assez souvent entretenu de ses terres dans l'Ukraine,—de ses haras, —de ses chasses à l'ours,—et autres plaisirs Gothiques. Aussi chez vous autres, les Princes—tels qu'ils soient—se répandent comme la Peste! témoin notre cher Bellune!*" he added, touching with his riding-whip, the shoulder of his young friend, who entered gaily into the pleasantry of the moment.

Lady Willersdale and Lady Isabella now escaped to their dressing-room to admire the elegance of their costumes for the coming evening; two French court-dresses, *de l'ancien régime*, on which Madame Girardot had expended her most elaborate fancy; and when—sustaining the characters of Cathos and Madelon, in the "*Précieuses ridicules*,"—the two lovely friends appeared before the select audience of the little fairy theatre of Holly-Wood that evening, universal acclamations of delight and admiration greeted their mere aspect. In spite of the powdered hair, rouge, and patches,—in spite of hoop and stomacher, Helen had never looked

more delicately beautiful;—she had the fantastic air of some graceful portrait by Greuze or Bouchard. The parts of Mascarille and Jodelet, meanwhile, were admirably supported by the two secretaries, Luxembourg and Bellune; Florence assumed the character of Marotte with considerable vivacity; and Lucile and Celimène fell to the share of Lady Anne Gardner and one of the Altamonts. Lord Gardner, and the Duke, and Lord Mellerton condescended to direct the scenery and *entrées;* and the Duchess, according to her promise, undertook the office of prompter. Nothing indeed could be more admirably managed than the whole affair; and the scene of the *impromptu* which was given with exquisite tact and *finesse* by the four principal performers, called forth reiterated applause.

Lady Isabella Vyvyan, in her long experience of *la vie de château* in the environs of Paris, as well as by a winter passed at Florence, had acquired considerable histrionic experience, and would have done credit to *le Théatre de Madame* itself. Yet notwithstanding the vivacity of her performance, the palm of prefer-

ence was universally conceded to that of Lady Willersdale. Anxious to excel in all she undertook, Helen had assiduously shared in the lessons given by Laporte to Lady Juliana C—— and a little knot of her female friends, and had profited surprisingly under his tuition. But it was not the perfection of her performance which imparted its excelling charm;—its defects were still more captivating. There was a delightful *gaucherie* in her movements;—a blushing reluctance in every word she uttered, which revealed the unextinguished modesty of the English gentlewoman, even throughout the utmost triumph of Madelon's mincing *minauderies.*

The curtain fell amid the general commendations of the illustrious audience; which was now ushered into the refreshment room to give time for a change of dress, and a brief moment of repose to the performers. The afterpiece had been announced as "*Le retour en Suisse;*" and great expectations were excited by the prospect of Lady Willersdale's Ketly. But scarcely had Helen reached the dressing-room, when

sinking on a chair, overcome in mind and body by the trepidation she had successfully repressed during the performance, she burst into tears, —and declared herself utterly incapable of fulfilling the remainder of her task. General consternation succeeded; and the kind motherly duchess, who was apprehensive that the persuasions of her friends would induce the invalid to persist in an effort beyond her strength, quietly left the room in search of Lord Willersdale, who immediately returned with her, and confirmed her opinion by a positive prohibition. She retired with the Duchess of Castleton to her own apartment.

"Dearest Lady Willersdale! what can have occurred to agitate you thus?"

"Nothing!—believe me, nothing. I was more grieved this morning than I cared to express by your intelligence touching Lady Danvers; and the scene of to-night—so closely resembling those of our last year's pleasures at Burwood—the sight of Wilmington already devoting his attentions to another—of so many of her former friends to whom the news of her affliction, or

sickness, or even death, would be as nothing—formed so painful a lesson to my feelings, that my spirits have sunk under the recoil. Honoria's destiny seems to rise like a warning before my eyes; and the occupations and diversions which probably corrupted *her*, become loathsome to my apprehensions. Poor Honoria!"

"I must not allow you to indulge in these violent emotions. You must lie down and compose yourself."

"On condition, dear Duchess, that you return to my friends, and apologize for my absence."

En attendant, what could equal the mortification and disappointment of the little group in the Green Room!

"*Et moi*," cried Luxembourg, "*qui comptois faire fureur avec mon petit moustache, et ma décoration! moi qui m'étois décidé à massacrer la belle Alberville par mon air à sentiment! Quel revers!*"

"And I," said Lady Isabella, despairingly, "who anticipated such flattering success from the pink clocks of my Swiss stockings!"

"And I," said her husband, to whom had

been assigned the part of Rutly, her *nigaud* son, "I, who have been devouring oranges since day-break to clear my voice."

"And I," exclaimed Lord Mellerton, with an air of mock heroism, "I, who was to have made my first appearance on any stage—what are your woes compared with mine?"—and he tossed across the room the laced livery-hat which was to have formed part of his costume. "Farewell! Othello's occupation's gone."

"Florence! *ma mignonne—ma petite chatte—ma belle amie—mon cher petit mouton!* oblige us by taking Lady Willersdale's place; you have gone through the part twice in rehearsal, and, *sans compliment*, with perfect success."

"Indeed you must excuse me!" said Miss Dudley, attempting to extricate herself from the group which now crowded round her. "It is a part quite beyond my powers, and altogether distasteful to me."

"You vain, selfish, little monster!" said Lady Isabella—

"Ah! *Mademoiselle!*" implored the Comte de Luxembourg.

"Miss Dudley is too considerate to disap-

point an expectant audience," murmured Count Vyvyan, smiling through his agony.

"Pray my dear Miss Dudley, favour us if it be indeed possible," pleaded the Duchess; who, having left Lady Willersdale to the cares of Mademoiselle Florentine, and her ether bottle, had returned to interest herself in their dilemma. "You will oblige your friend by diverting the attention of the company from her indisposition, and will give us all pleasure."

"Is your Grace really of opinion that I ought to undertake so prominent a part?" said Florence, blushing with terror.

"Indeed, my dear, I am. Trust to your own abilities, to the prompting of your own feeling heart, and your Ketly will be perfect. Ladies and Gentlemen!—gratify yourselves by the assurance of Miss Dudley's assent; finish your own toilet, and I will preside over hers. Come with me!" she continued, drawing the reluctant arm of Florence within her own. "Lady Willersdale's costume will exactly fit you, except that from her superiority in height, the classical Swiss brevity of petticoat will be superseded; an advantage which, if I know

you, you will duly appreciate; and Madle. Florentine and her Swiss pins will not be disappointed."

Nothing, however, could exceed the disappointment of the little auditory on the entrance of Miss Dudley in the character their expectations had assigned to Lady Willersdale. It was in vain that Lady Isabella as the *aubergiste* scolded and threatened;—it was in vain that Vyvyan afforded an admirable specimen of the Swiss *dadais* in the part of her gawky son; they were determined to be discontented. But it is written that

> One touch of nature makes the whole world kin;

and even Lady Alberville in despite of her jealousy, and even Mr. Brill, in despite of his envy, hatred, and malice, were soon forced to yield the homage of their tears to Miss Dudley's admirable delineation of the ingenuous and touching Ketly.

During her earlier scenes, the annoyance and embarrassment of her own feelings imparted to her acting that dispirited and self-abandoned air so well adapted to her *rôle:* but on the ar-

rival of the traveller,—on her recognition of her long-lost lover, a flush of rapture and surprise gleamed upon her countenance, such as the utmost perfection of art had vainly attempted to display. Her voice faltered with real emotion,—her eyes were suffused with genuine tears,—her lips quivered with the intense agony of her joy! for at that moment her glancing eye had detected among the most remote group of the spectators the presence dearest to her heart.—Yes! Harry Mitford himself was seated in the back-ground of the pit, in grave companionship with Lord Barton and William Daly!—From that moment her efforts assumed an almost supernatural character of perfection, for they were prompted by the unerring instigations of nature; and in the romance of "*Sur le tombeau de ma mère*," her tones became modulated by such exquisite tenderness, such gentle delicacy, that even the triumphant naiveté of her "*Non*"—the monosyllable which Colon has rendered so marvellously eloquent,—was forgotten in a clamorous *encore!*

Poor Florence!—in the joyous excitation of

her bewildered feelings, little did she imagine that Lord Barton's letters to his sister, and Daly's to his gossipping mother, had already conveyed to Ireland the intelligence of her supposed attachment and engagement to Lord Forreston: that having been accidentally niched in the refreshment room between Lady Anne Gardner and Mr. Melbourne, Harry Mitford had been entertained by a most detailed and embellished recountal of the terrace-scene of the morning; and that he had already heard her accused of having engaged both Mellerton and Neville in a lingering flirtation, in order to be secure of a *pis-aller* in case of the indifference or inconstancy of the fastidious Forreston!—Perceiving, however, that Lady Anne was both pretty and spiteful enough to be a discomfited rival, Mr. Mitford still withheld his belief; but a few minutes afterwards he had the conclusive misery of hearing the Duchess of Castleton, on whose countenance truth, and every other feminine virtue, was legibly depicted, enlarge to Lord Gardner and Lord de Quensy upon Forreston's great good fortune, in having so long deferred

his marriage, to be at length rewarded by the affections of a person so estimable, and so lovely, as Lady Willersdale's favourite friend.

Harry was scarcely less indignant than startled by these corroborative assertions. His trust had been ardent, and tender, and true; and his disappointment was mingled with a thousand angry feelings.

Mr. Mitford had been summoned to England by the express invitation of Lady Gertrude Wentworth; and although his journey had been greatly expedited by the tidings conveyed to Willersville by the officious Daly, still he cherished such fond and fervent confidence in the upright excellence of his Florence, that he was persuaded one word of remonstrance or interrogation on his part, would unravel the mystery to his entire satisfaction. Scarcely had he arrived in town, when he was invited by Lord Barton to accompany him that night to the Richmond theatricals. The natural jealousy of his affection found immediate cause of displeasure in the publicity of the exhibition. He beheld for the first time in his modest gentle Florence, an

accomplished and inspired actress,—and he joined not in the plaudits of the crowd; he heard her cited as the betrothed bride of Lord Forreston,—and he trembled for his own prospects of happiness;—as the flirting light o' love of Neville and Mellerton, and he turned away with all the loathing of disgust!

Still he resolved to hear her, to address her, to learn from her own lips the change of her own feelings; and seek a reconciliation or a final farewell, as her own declarations might justify. He resolved to linger till the close of the performance; and it was well that he did so, for a trifling circumstance availed to determine his opinions. William Daly, in the malice of his heart, had not only pointed out to him his elegant and attractive rival, but had so placed him, that he might overhear the jealous criticisms with which Lady Alberville was attempting to vex and pique Lord Forreston, touching the partial applause prompted by his supposed attachment. True to the cause of Miss Dudley, he advocated her merits as an actress, with equal judgment and moderation; and his commendation was supported by the

candid warmth of Clarence Wilmington, and instantly opposed, with still more virulent ill-nature, by the irritated little Viscountess.

With Lady Alberville and her jealousy, Lord Forreston had all the patience of good-breeding; but when Theodosius Brill, deceived by his coolness, and instigated by a desire of toadying the fair lady of Rosemount, interposed some of the insolent vulgarity of his own strictures on Miss Dudley's mind, manners, and mode of acting, Forreston turned suddenly upon him, and having looked him into dust, treated him exactly as a gigantic mastiff chastises the snarling of some little yelping cur. In a very few words, he made his insignificance and presumption evident even to himself.

But Brill was well aware that this was no case for retaliation; that his standing in the world in comparison with that of Lord Forreston, was as the standard of a gnat, buzzing round the Rhodian Colossus:—his only hesitation was how to render his apology sufficiently degrading to himself, and deprecatory towards the offended magnat of the kingdom of fashion.

"Had he imagined the lady in question to be an object of so much interest to his lordship, he should have treated her with the respect due to such a distinction; for the future Lord Forreston might command his opinion in her favour."

William Daly turned with a delighted smile to gaze upon Mitford's compressed lips, and moistened brow. "Her champion you see—her avowed champion!—openly assumes the rights of an affianced lover."

"Good night," replied Harry, unconsciously pressing his hand. "Make my excuses to Barton; I must return to London immediately, and alone."

Lord Barton, however, having encountered him in the vestibule, and perceiving the distressed perturbation of his mind, expressed a fixed determination to bear him company. The carriage was opportunely in waiting, and they were gone in a moment. The rash precipitancy of lovers has been immemorially proverbial.

Florence Dudley, meanwhile, was tortured by the importunate flattery of adulation which surrounded her on the fall of the curtain. How

gladly would she have dispensed with all the elaborate prose in which her admirers attempted to prove to her own satisfaction, *which* and *whence* were the prominent merits of her performance! Some ventured to suggest a trifling change; some combated the possibility of any amendment, with parliamentary prolixity of argument; and Florence found that her only chance of escape from the garrulous group, was by whispering the cause of her impatience to Lady Isabella Vyvyan, who was fortunately one of the delightful minority *de ceux qui entendent à demi-mot.*

"Get ye gone! good people—get ye gone," she exclaimed, "and give us time to reassume our Christian habiliments. Do not, however, expect us to favour you with a fresh coïffure: we are so anxious to go and be flattered by the throng without, that you must accept us *à la Suisse* for the rest of the evening. Flo! my dear Flo!" she continued, after having bolted out further intrusion, "*que je t'embrasse!* These blushes, this agitation convince me that all is right—that I have been unjust in misdoubting your fidelity. *Vite—vite—Florentine!*

il ne nous faut que la toilette d'un moment!" and in less than five minutes she was guiding the tremulous steps of Florence through the temporary corridors towards the saloon. "My dear child! I am delighted! you really tremble; neither Lady Anne nor myself could be more sentimental. Ah! I have hopes of you for a heroine after all!"

They had some difficulty in making their way through the crowded apartments.

"Where is my brother,—have you seen Barton?" inquired Lady Isabella, with true feminine equivocation of Mr. Brill, who greeted Florence, on her approach, with a most obsequious bow.

"Lord Barton was here half an hour ago; but as I observed him in company with a stranger whom—no one knew—I did not address him."

"Can you give me any tidings of Barton?" persisted Lady Isabella, addressing herself to William Daly, who was keeping guard with the most supercilious air over Lady Alberville.

"His Lordship and Mr. Mitford returned to

town some time ago. They had probably some other engagement, for they did not even sit out the performance."

"Lady Alberville will be the ruin of that silly boy," whispered Lady Isabella, as she turned away, anxious to conceal the distress of her companion. "She is teaching him to be *fine*. He was bad enough when only solemn; but *finery* is the supreme perfection of human vulgarity." By this time she had extricated Miss Dudley from the crowd. "Cheer up, and rouse yourself, my dearest Flo; do not let these people perceive your agitation. Depend on it there is some idle misunderstanding in all this; depend on it Barton, in a fit of his folly, persuaded Mitford that he must not present himself uninvited at the supper-table."

"But not to speak to me! not—"

"How on earth was he to discover your hiding-place among strange people in a strange house? To-morrow you will receive a letter of explanation; and on Wednesday we all return to town, and you *must* meet. Be a good child—dry your tears, and come to supper. Remember how many eyes are upon you."

Miss Dudley lent herself to these judicious counsels with as good a grace as she could command. They returned to the gay assemblage; and Lord Forreston having claimed the arm of Florence, Lady Isabella accepted that of the Prince de Bellune. Seats had been retained for them near Lady Willersdale, who had sufficiently recovered herself to reappear among her guests: she was still however of a death-like paleness; and it was generally noticed that the two lovely friends who had graced the commencement of the evening with their usual resplendent brilliancy of beauty, had attained the tint and air of marble statues previous to its close.

Towards the end of the supper, Lord Bernard Neville, who had been absent during the whole day, sauntered into the room. "Where have you been hiding yourself, Neville?" greeted him on every side.

"I don't know; I can hardly remember. I went off to town early in the morning, because I thought I had some engagement there; and when I got to Mivart's, I could not find my memorandum book."

"So, like the gallant Marlbrook, you marched back again."

"No! I marched on. I went to Greenwich fair; and, as I was riding in a roundabout with Grenville, and Percy, and Howard, I remembered that my business in London was to procure the *partition* of Guillaume Tell for Miss Dudley; and so I have come back *entre chien et loup*, and too late for the play!"

"Come, come, be honest, my dear fellow," exclaimed Lord Mellerton; "and own that you have taken all this trouble merely to show the world, that, as you were not admitted among our actors, you scorned to be one of our spectators. It would have been an economy of time, and place, and coin, to advertise the fact in all the daily papers."

"*Ah! fi!—vous me faites frémir!* To figure in columnar notoriety, between the charities of our friend the Duchess,—Lord B's quarterly reduction of his rents,—filtering machines, quinine lozenges, and the Siamese brethren,—would be a penance beyond the flagrancy of my worst of sins. By the way, I met Barton on the road, driving *comme un pos-*

sédé, or a cabinet courier. Hurry is the greatest insult that can be offered by the mind to the body; *il me semble qu'on se doit plus de respect.* Lady Isabella! a glass of champagne?"

"With pleasure!—*Mon cher Comte! donnez vous la peine de me remplacer,—je me sens déjà toute assonpie.*"

CHAPTER IX.

I come to wive it wealthily in Padua;
If wealthily, then happily.
The Taming of the Shrew.

It will readily be believed that the perplexed and agitated Florence found the hours of that long sleepless night tedious beyond her powers of computation. With the consciousness of good intentions, and the honesty of perfect faith in our own conduct, it is so difficult, so bewildering, so painful, to account for the inconsistency or treachery of others!

The morning past slowly away, and still the offender came not, sent not, wrote not! and, oh! how importunate appeared the careless merriment of the Holly-Wood guests; how vain, how forced, how superfluous their laborious chase after the rainbow-gleam of pleasure.

Lady Isabella still kindly stole away from time to time from among the joyous group, to whisper words of consolation and hope to the silent sufferer; to whom she so far sacrificed her own predilections and vanities, as to insist upon a general relinquishment of the repetition of their theatrical exhibition; alleging the state of Lady Willersdale's health, and her own disinclination, as motives for the proposal. A large party, however, had been invited, and something must be done for their entertainment; and with Helen's eager sanction, she immediately made out the programme of a little concert;—including all the glees, canons, and catches of all the Ladies Altamont,—a comic duet between Lord Mellerton and Count Vyvyan, which she dispatched them into the music room to rehearse, — and a lively interspersion of Henry Melbourne's *ariette carbonari*, and other guitar romanticisms. It was arranged too that the evening should conclude with an impromptu ball; after all, the most popular species of amusement extant!—inasmuch as it gratifies the self-love of the largest portion of society.

It was one of those moist, dreamy days of April, when we see the buds expanding through many a passing shower, and are tempted out upon the scarcely sprinkled gravel by the rapid gleams of sunshine, to be driven back as quickly by the rain drops pattering among the crisp holly-leaves. Between the pauses of the weather, Clarence Wilmington found his way to Holly-Wood with a thousand inquiries and anxieties from Lady Alberville, touching Lady Willersdale's indisposition of the preceding night; and Forreston, who was equally distressed and mystified by Miss Dudley's evident discomfiture, and still more profoundly touched by the languid looks and pale cheeks of Helen, was glad to escape the general disorganization of the party, by offering to accompany Wilmington's ride on his return to Rosemount.

Lord Forreston had, however, a peculiar object in this *tête-à-tête*. He was at length becoming conscious of the *géne* and embarrassment he had incurred, in his encouragement or tolerance of Lady Alberville's views upon his hand; he had originally promoted her delusion to mask his former defeat with the unconscious

Helen; and finding his present views better fulfilled by a supposed engagement with Helen's constant associate, he had at length made up his mind to *brusquer la belle Vicomtesse, sans compte rendu.* His intimate acquaintance with her character, assured him however that *pour rompre sans esclandre et sans bruit,* his safest course was to allow her to believe *him* superseded by her own caprice; and he had fixed upon Clarence Wilmington as his *remplaçant.* Lady Alberville's fancy was too refined to content itself with any common-place adorer; and Wilmington was himself too romantic to assume the fetters of matrimony solely in honour of their golden material. Lord Forreston therefore determined to address himself to the ruling passion of one party, and to the ruling folly of the other. He persuaded Lady Alberville that she had robbed Lady Danvers — the rival of her utmost detestation—of her favoured lover; and in the course of half an hour's saunter among the Mortlake and Chiswick lanes, he succeeded in satisfying the astonished Clarence that the lovely, the admired, the graceful Lady Alberville, had long cherished a secret and sentimental

passion for himself! Having sown the seed of his projects by this twofold treachery, he left it to germinate and expand, as the idleness and frivolity of both might serve to propitiate the plan.

"And by the way, Forreston," said Wilmington, who fell into the springe as readily as Malvolio himself, and who felt bound in gratitude to become reciprocally interested in the love affairs of so kind a friend, "how admirably you silenced that *poupée parlante*, Brill, in his impertinent comments on Miss Dudley last night."

"I trust, Clarence, you will *congédier* that animal, when you become master of Rosemount;—a man who commenced his ascent in society by teaching Lady L.'s parrot to echo his puns, and by enacting Punch and Judy for the amusement of the idiotic Lord of H. I can conceive the *use* of such a person: for we know that even the purest administration has dirty work which must be done by dirty hands; and I would have a man who has done the state some service, rewarded by place, and pension, and the respect due to his abilities and fidelity.

But to admit him among our household gods, to share our bread and salt with him—is a concession which degrades ourselves, and misleads his own preposterous vanity. I value my horse," he continued, patting the high-bred animal as he spoke, and I am grateful to him for bearing me scatheless through this muddy lane; but I do not think it necessary to introduce him into Lady Alberville's boudoir, which I now consider as irrecoverably resigned, Clarence, to your future legislation."

"Lady Willersdale seems quite herself again this morning. How surpassingly lovely she looked in her *costume de Louis XIV!* I don't think Willersdale was quite pleased with our applause; he has been looking ill, and harassed, and *gêné* for some time past. Lady Danvers used to swear he was jealous of *you*, Forreston; but as long as I can remember him, he has always been a taciturn kind of man. Let him be as talented as he will, he contributes nothing to the pleasures of society."

"In my opinion he talks quite as much as becomes the dignity of his station. It is his part—and one that he amply fulfils—to *act*

nobly; and in such a case, how difficult to 'suit the word to the action!' We read his mind in its results,—in the prosperity of the land; for my own part, I should as soon desire to hear Coriolanus grow jocose, and Brutus deal in *les petits riens de société*, as Lord Willersdale."

Satisfied that he had defeated the curiosity of his companion by this reply, and being now within sight of the Rosemount avenue, Lord Forreston kissed his hand, and rode back to Richmond.

It was fortunate for Florence Dudley that she had the certainty of the morrow's return to London, to sustain her spirits during the gaieties of the evening; or she would have been wholly disqualified for assisting Lady Willersdale in the task of entertaining her guests. Helen herself, who was secretly enchanted by an offence on the part of Harry Mitford, calculated to advance her favourite projects, affected to regard her dejection as absurd and romantic; and Florence found herself obliged to sing, and dance, and converse, while her heart was oppressed with sorrow and apprehension. The

pensive languor of her air was attributed by the society in general, to the sentiment duly becoming her recent engagement with Lord Forreston;—who scarcely left her side, and was truly and sincerely anxious in his inquiries as to the cause of her depression, and in his offers of service and friendship. But although his regard for Miss Dudley, and his anxieties, were indeed sincere,—his professions were studiously breathed within the hearing of Lady Willersdale!

"Never mind them! dearest Flo!" whispered Lady Isabella between the *entr'actes* of her flirtation with the Comte de Luxembourg. "We shall be in town to-morrow; and before night, *foi d'Isabelle!*—the mystery shall be unravelled."

Vain however are the calculations of mortal men and women,—we are prophets only of the past! Scarcely had they returned to Hamilton Place, when an express arrived from Lady Mordaunt, announcing family tidings of no less importance than the sudden death of Sir Robert Lilfield! and Helen, whose mind was never darkened by his image from Christmas to Christ-

mas, and who had not exchanged sixteen sentences with him during his life-time, was required by the etiquettes of society to be deeply afflicted by his loss,—to close her door against visitors,—and to be "as well as could be expected," in case any very devoted humble servant of Downing Street dignitaries, should think it expedient to inquire after her health.

"And now, my dear Helen," wrote Lady Mordaunt, after the usual dolefuls and the old-established consolatory reflection, 'that *every thing had been done for their poor dear friend*,' "and now you must oblige me by undertaking a very important commission. Anna Maria's mourning must be ordered without delay; and when I tell you that poor dear Sir Robert has marked his sense of her exemplary conduct by leaving her the sole guardianship of his poor dear children,—the Beech-Park estates during her life,—with six thousand a year for their maintenance,—I think you will allow that every thing should be of the handsomest and *deepest* kind. The will was made by the family lawyer Mr. Unctionheir; a great *protégé* of my daughter Lilfield's; it contains some very affecting

allusions to her conjugal tenderness which I shall hereafter transcribe for your perusal, and which I have no doubt she will preserve to exhibit to her children's children! It was in fact executed just after poor dear Sir Robert's last paralytic seizure;—I always predicted, if you remember, that Phlogiston's system would expedite his end!

"Your sister's mantuamakers are Mesdames Hobson and Jobson, of Charlotte Street, Bloomsbury. Her express directions are that no French materials should be introduced into her weeds;—such indeed has been her general praiseworthy rule!—but as she herself observes, it is now more than ever her duty, as proprietress of Beech Park, to show a public example on these points. She adds, that in her present state of profound affliction, she wishes her bonnet to tie under the chin, and to be made of stout paduasoy for walking;—observing that she always wears it down on the left side. By the way, I dare say the executors will make poor dear Anna Maria some further allowance on the children's account; as they are all well pro-

vided for, and cannot you know be kept for nothing. Pray, my dearest Helen, impress upon the minds of Mesdames H. and J. that the weepers are to be of the *broadest* width usual on these melancholy occasions.

"I suppose you have heard of the Forsyths' adventure. All's well, however, that ends well.

Yours affectionately,
M. A. MORDAUNT."

After a solemn interview with the head of the house of Hobson, and a final decision between the claims of crape, lawn, mode, and ducape, Lady Willersdale became curious to ascertain what was the "*end*" that had proved so favourable to the "*adventure*" of the Forsyth family: and Mr. Secretary Daly was fitted out as a discovery ship, to penetrate the mystery and "to worship the echo" of the clubs. It was a tale that every one was glad to tell; for it involved the fall of pride, and an exposure of human frailty.

Lucy Forsyth's marriage, it appeared, had

proceeded through all the peremptory stages of fashionable hymeneals. Her miniature had been duly limned, both for "Anatolius" and for "the beloved family she was about to quit." Triaud's *demoiselles couturières* had pricked their fingers through many a vigil, and Maradan's *demoiselles modistes* advanced many degrees towards ophthalmia in the expedition of her *trousseau;*—for Auta Nauta, who declared himself engaged to meet his friends the Grand Duke of Nassau, and his cousin Prince Boscoberevitsch at Emsbaden, early in the month of May, would listen to no plea of retardment.—When James, senr. arrived at the critical point of settlements, and consols, and long annuities,—a point rendered somewhat thorny by the necessity of mutual interpretation,—Anatolius indignantly twirling his mustachios at the bare mention of a jointure, began to grandiloquize touching the dowry assigned for centuries, by right immemorial, or perhaps by "right divine," to the Princesses dowager of Auta Nauta, and it was with a very visible depression of crest that he found himself required to affix his serene signature to one of those horrible cabalistic parch-

ments which secure the interests of the bride against the future encroachments of the tender bridegroom; and which generally imprison the resources of both against all plea of starvation for the remainder of their days.

The day and the hour were appointed!—the Right Reverend was bespoken, the special license secured; and, that every thing might be ordered according to the severest canons of *ton*, Mrs. Forsyth's frippery drawing-room was sanctified for the occasion into the house of prayer; and an *écarté* table covered with a damask cloth was made to represent the altar of the Almighty!

Eight o'clock struck!—the velvet hassocks were formally disposed for the serene knees of the prince and princess; the temporary church glowed with the blaze of waxen tapers; and the bishop and the little strutting parish clerk were in impatient attendance. The bridemaidens—Lady Juliana C. and one of the Honourable Georginas of Grosvenor Place, who had agreed to share the office with Charlotte Forsyth for the pleasure of laughing at the whole affair, began to grow fidgety; for they had no Freischutz chorus to

sing, and no jewels to yawn over:—the considerate Auta Nauta having repossessed himself of his diamonds, and emeralds, and chrysoberyls, in order to have a casket made for the Emsbaden journey, heraldically emblazoned with the seigneurial escutcheon of his house!

Eight o'clock had struck!—the quarters, one, two, and three, had chimed;—nine o'clock and its quarters; ten and its importunate chimes followed with unrelenting exactness—but no Auta Nauta!——Mr. Forsyth, agonized by the repeated episcopal yawns which he had himself provoked as a "spectre huntsman," running down the ghost of the Catholic question—a phantom as obsolete as the shade of Ninus—requested Jem to step into the travelling-carriage in waiting at the door—a wedding-present from James, senr.—and to visit the lodgings of the laggard in love, for whose ominous unpunctuality poor Lucy's tears were already beginning to fall. Unhappy girl!—her splendid Blonde veil, and the bishop's lawn-sleeves were already mournfully flaccidized by all this inopportune delay.

After a half-hour's pause, the four post-horses

were heard rattling back to the door, and the anxious father hastened out of the room to reproach the tardy bridegroom in the hall. Ascending footsteps were heard on the stairs, and the damsels in orange-flower garlands telegraphed a smile of anticipation;—but no Anatolius!!—Mrs. Forsyth and her daughters were mysteriously summoned to a family conclave in the dining-room; and lo! in process of time, an hysteric shriek and its concomitant vapours of ether became audible and perceptible. Amid the suppressed murmur of a chorus of sobs from the regions below, James Montagu advanced on his two left legs towards the bishop, muttering that the marriage was adjourned *sine die;*—insinuated an appeasing portion of coin into the hand of the astonished guardian of the parochial register;—and into the ears of the Lady Juliana and the Honourable Georgina, an intimation that the carriages of their respective sires were in impatient attendance. Before midnight the baffled guests were gone—the rosewood altar desecrated—and the whole household of mine host of the Barbican, plunged in the bitterness of grief and mortification!—

But why prolong the mystery? Jem (J. M.) had found the lodging of his serene and illustrious kinsman elect, solely inhabited by bailiffs and sheriff's officers; and reverberative of no tenderer sighs than those of Messrs. Storr and Mortimer, Rundell and Bridge, Hamlet and Kitching! Prince Anatolius Auta Nauta, with his bear-hunts and his archives, and his cousin Boscoberevitsch, having absconded with their property to the amount of £17,000, and a fraction, interesting only to those united martyrs!! it became gradually demonstrated to the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of all, that his Serene Highness—(one Anton Hauder), had been originally a waiter in a coffee-house in Trieste, then valet to an English officer; in which successive capacities, having increased his personal property by the gold watch and silver spoons of his employers, he had fled to Baden; set up a table as the Chevalier de la Roulette; been expunged by the Austrian police, only that he might follow up his profession more profitably at Emms; and that finally, having assisted an English countess in a picturesque overturn of her carriage on the Drachenfels, he had been re-

warded with one of those flourishing letters of introduction to her London kindred, which English ladies bestow and welcome so unadvisedly, in favour of a — fine, sallow, sublime, sort of Werter-faced man, who can dance the *galopade*, and talk about bear-hunts!

"*Et où donc est la fin qui doit couronner l'œuvre?*" exclaimed Lady Willersdale to Mr. Secretary Daly, at the close of his narrative. "The affair appears to me to end any thing but *well.*"

Further, the deponent could not say;—but *we*, the initiated, will with our public's benign permission, pursue the mystery as far as clue may be lead. On the following evening, just as the Auta Nauta hoax was affording a delicious novelty to the *cancans* of all the clubs,—just as the Forsyth family was assembled in active deliberation on the most efficient mode of sopping into silence that many-headed monster, the Scylla of the public press, there arrived a flummering letter from the sympathizing Theodosius Brill; lamenting that his "still fondly-beloved Lucy should have been overpersuaded

by her nearest connexions (!) to sacrifice her reason to her ambition; and assuring her that his own unalterable attachment afforded her, in the prospect of an immediate union with another, her only chance of escape from the bitter irony of society. The existing settlements —since it was his intention to place her own fortune at her own disposal, would but require the substitution of his own name; the *trousseau* (coronets excepted) was still available;—it only remained for her to fix an immediate day, to render him the happiest of men!"

Poor Lucy was puzzled through her tears. Charlotte, who was apprehensive that the discovery of the Auta Nauta conspiracy would invalidate her own last chance with Lord Mellerton became a decided Brillite. James senr., thoroughly out of humour, begged that no further reference might be made to his paternal opinion on such occasions; Jem, who was anxious for the "ploy" of another wedding, strongly supported the claims of Theodosius; and mamma, having ascertained that the salary of the said Theodosius diminished His Majesty's revenues to the amount of £*000 per annum, sanctioned an in-

stant acceptance of the proposal. As there was to be neither special license nor illustrious bridesmaids included in this second edition of Lucy's nuptials, they were celebrated within the week; and Mr. and Mrs. Brill were already on their tour to the lakes, before the detonation of the former crash could be traced to its source.

"Well, my dear Charlotte," said little Mrs. Willis Clinton, detaining her cousin at the gate of Kensington Gardens some days afterwards; "so the cards have been shuffled into their right places! I always predicted that Lucy would arrive at an illustrious destiny; and how much better to preside over her *petits soupers* of actors, and authors, and officials, and fine ladies (delicious olio!) than to share the tattered throne of some basaltic palace on the banks of the Dnieper! Dear Lucy will now become a blue—will

> Like Cato give her little senate laws,
> And sit attentive to her own applause.

All the Brills are enchanted with the connexion; and I have promised to bring your new sister, Mrs. Samuel Skinner, to call upon you next

week. Good bye, dear Chat!—How is our friend, Lady Juliana?—By the way, I hear that the Charming Sally has put back into Liverpool; and that Prince Auta Nauta will probably be hanged after all. Clinton says you will certainly be subpœnaed on the trial; but ladies may always keep down their veils when they appear at the Old Bailey. *Au revoir*, my dear Coz."

CHAPTER XI.

Mon. Alas! my brother,
What have I done, and why do you abuse me?
My heart quakes in me—in your clouded brow
And evil eye methinks I see my fate.
Use me but gently, like a loving brother;
And search through all the secrets of my soul.
Cham. Fear nothing—I will prove myself a brother!
The Orphan.

The period of secession from the peremptory claims of the gay world, necessitated by the decease of the phlogistic victim had already elapsed, yet Lady Willersdale appeared to cling to the excuse thus afforded, in order to prolong her retirement within the happy solitude of her luxurious home. Secure of the society of her own little knot of chosen intimates, she seemed to shrink from the importunate publicity of the thousand and one balls which, during the merry month of May, serve to congre-

gate the self-same five hundred faces, in divers streets and squares of the more civilized parishes of the metropolis; and not unfrequently to exhibit the self-same Gunterian tongues and chickens upon their successive supper-tables.

It must be confessed, however, that an *arrière-pensée* lurked under this apparent moderation. Helen was well content that the alienated Florence should run no risk of an encounter and reconciliation with her lover, by braving the chances of mixed assemblies; and still better satisfied that she should be exposed daily, and at all hours, to the fascinating *entretien* of the elegant Forreston. Even Lady Isabella, the staunchest and latest adherent to Harry Mitford's cause, began to be disgusted by his ungracious estrangement; and to relax in the rigour of her prejudices against the new aspirant. Vainly had she attempted to fulfil her promise of satisfying the doubts of Miss Dudley as to Mr. Mitford's unaccountable appearance and disappearance. Lord Barton was gone down to fish on his Wharfdale estates; but his servants had assured her that he was wholly unaccompanied. Lady Gertrude Went-

worth, according to the report of the old doting porter in St. James's Square, was still rusticating at a battlemented red-brick mansion in Enfield Chase, which she was pleased to call her villa; and on being further interrogated as to the possibility of a young gentleman from Ireland having been invited to share its rural pleasures, the grey-headed servitor waxed wroth, and would scarcely condescend to vindicate the maiden fame of a mistress thus unjustly aspersed.

Poor Florence, meanwhile, remained seriously grieved and discomfited; for although she had no suspicion of Lady Willersdale's manœuvres in favour of Forreston, she saw that all her friends united in condemnation of Harry's conduct; she knew that *l'absent a toujours tort;* and she could devise no possible method by which to detect and win the object of this latter peril, to personal vindication of himself and his fault. At length, however, an occasion presented itself. Accompanied by the Vyvyans, Lady Willersdale suffered herself to be tempted to Epsom races; and several times in the hurry of the course, Mr. Mitford passed and repassed the carriage.

They saw young Harry with his beaver up.

But alas! although he could neither overlook nor mistake their brilliant equipage, he rode by without any seeming recognition of the party; and thus put the finishing stroke to Lady Isabella's indignation. "My dear Lady W." she whispered, "I give you my august permission to win her for Lord Forreston as soon as you please. That bearish boy has proved himself altogether unworthy of her."

Nor was this the worst consequence ensuing from that anniversary of London pleasure, which fills our mouths with dust, our hearts with thankless weariness, and the toll-treasury of the county of Surrey with pence.

On the following morning, Captain Mordaunt, with a face blanched by some inexplicable emotion, made his appearance in the drawing-room in Hamilton Place, where Lady Willersdale was occupied in inditing some idle note of invitation.

"Helen!" said he, drawing a newspaper abruptly from his pocket, and pointing to a particular paragraph, "*is this thing true?*"

"What thing?—you know I never read a newspaper."

"Did you appear yesterday on the course at Epsom in Lord Forreston's carriage?"

"Certainly!—my own horses took fright at the painted placards of a tiger-show; Lady Isabella and myself were both terrified by their restive violence, and I was only too happy to accept the proffered loan of Lord Forreston's britschka, which chanced to be near us at the time."

"Imprudent girl! to expose yourself thus publicly to the malicious comments of united London! Helen, Helen! I have withdrawn myself too much from your society: anxious to shun the continual presence of one whom I could love to madness, and whom it were madness on my part to love, I have avoided Florence Dudley without consideration for my sister's peril! I scorned to be of your Richmond party, because I knew I should see you made the cat's-paw of the Vyvyans; and yesterday their expected presence again induced me to refuse your invitation to Epsom. Would, would to God I

had accompanied you; and then this cursed foolery would never have occurred."

"Pardon me! I do not see that your presence would have moderated the violence of my horses."

"Helen!" replied Captain Mordaunt, looking with a scrutinizing air into her face, "you do not really mean to assert that you were alarmed by four jaded beasts who had travelled seventeen miles in the morning sun?"

"Indeed I do!—and you have moved my curiosity to peruse the paragraph that has thus unreasonably exasperated your feelings."

He placed the papers in her hands, with an indignant air; and with a scarcely less indignant glance, the eye of Lady Willersdale fell upon the following statement.

"Among the illustrious beauties adorning the race-course, we were particularly struck by the graceful loveliness of the lady of our Premier; and perhaps our admiration was somewhat enhanced by our sympathy in the dangers of the position in which she had thus publicly placed herself. We beg to remind Lady W——e,

that her *friend* stands first in the list of the Lotharios of the day; and trembling for her powers of resistance, we venture to assure her ladyship that

He comes too near, who comes to be denied."

"Shameful!" exclaimed Helen.

"Yet nothing is asserted, which your own conduct has not abundantly confirmed. Helen! you well know how much I love you—how much beyond all others of my family; yet, by the God who made me! I would sooner see you in your grave, than behold *my* sister—my own pure sister—level herself with the wanton tribe of women of fashion who degrade our society! —than behold her insult the kindest and most honourable of husbands by the senseless levity of her conduct!"

"Thank you, my dear John, thank you both for him and for myself," cried Lady Willersdale, with tears streaming on her cheek. "And thank heaven too, that I can listen to such observations without one remorseful sigh. I have told you before, and I repeat it, that Willersdale and myself equally encourage the

frequent visits of Lord Forreston, solely in regard to his attentions to Florence."

"And in the name of all that is good, why does he not bring them to a crisis? What prevents him, independent as he is, from making his proposals? Sister, though I acquit you of being a deceiver, I still believe you to be deceived; Forreston has no such intentions as you imagine."

At this unlucky juncture, Lord Forreston himself was announced; he had a general morning *entrée*, and there was no time to intercept his visit,—he followed Vernon into the room. The first object that met his astonished view, was Lady Willersdale's tearful cheek; the next was the agitated and angry countenance of Captain Mordaunt. Even when the door had closed on the domestic, he did not seat himself, but seemed to await some further explanation from both.

"Forreston," said Captain Mordaunt, still holding the newspaper in his hand, and attempting to assume a more composed tone, "you and I are old acquaintance—perhaps, as the world runs, I might say old friends: for

we have both fought and feasted side by side. I am therefore prompted to address my remonstrances to *you*, in a different spirit from that which would move me under similar circumstances, towards any other man."

"You surprise—you alarm me, Mordaunt!" exclaimed Lord Forreston, glancing once more towards Lady Willersdale's disordered appearance. "What can have agitated you in this extraordinary manner?"

"*This*," replied Captain Mordaunt, pointing out to his notice the offensive allusion.

"Villain,—ruffian!—horsewhip—fine—imprisonment!" muttered Forreston between his teeth, as he crushed the paper violently, and threw it from him. "Dearest Lady Willersdale, how can I apologize—how atone to you, for being the involuntary cause of this base outrage."

Captain Mordaunt, somewhat jealous of his tenderness of look and tone, interrupted him. "Lord Forreston, you cannot but acknowledge that your unsanctioned attentions to Miss Dudley have been the cause, the *voluntary* cause, of a thousand idle rumours prejudicial to Lady Willersdale's reputation. *I*, as her brother,

cannot suffer the continuance of this. Permit me, therefore, to inquire explicitly what are your real intentions relative to my sister's friend."

"And will you deign, Mordaunt, to acquaint me, in return, in what character you frame your demand?—whether as Miss Dudley's guardian, or brother, or lover?"

"Would that I could lay a just claim to either of these titles; for my question should then be far more peremptorily urged; as it is—I address you as the brother of Lady Willersdale,—as the guardian of *her* fame. My sister appears convinced of your attachment to her young friend, and is warmly desirous of your union,—and she it is who has hitherto moderated my impatience on the subject."

"Is this true?" inquired Lord Forreston of Helen. "Are you indeed anxious that I should unite myself with Miss Dudley?—Nay! then, be it so. You, at least, have every right to be obeyed. Charge yourself, therefore, with my proposals—say every thing for me that you wish should be said."

"I need only repeat what I have often said

already; that you, of all the world, are the person most gifted to render her happy; that Florence and her affection—which I fear you have in some measure yet to win—will unfailingly insure your own future happiness. I need scarcely add, that I shall myself rejoice in a connexion between two friends whom I deeply value."

"Yet stay," said Lord Forreston, eagerly seizing upon any pretext for delay, and for the possible occurrence of some unforeseen impediment, "Miss Dudley has spoken to me of her guardian; it will be more respectful to both, if I secure in the first instance his sanction to my addresses. Favour me Captain Mordaunt with Mr. Edwards's address."

"In six days you will receive an answer to your application," observed Capt. M. as he delivered him the necessary directions.

"In the interim, let me request you, Lady Willersdale, to avoid all premature agitation of the question with Miss Dudley. I have, as you have yourself observed, my way to win in her affections; and it were injudicious to startle her by any thing like abruptness."

"*In the interim*," thought Captain Mordaunt, as he left the room, "trust to a brother's vigilance to hold a watchful eye upon your own proceedings."

Restrained by Lord Forreston's prohibition, it was only to her friend Lady Isabella Vyvyan that Helen could indulge in the expression of her satisfaction. "Now that your *engouement* in Mr. Mitford's favour has subsided," she said, "surely you will allow that dear Florence is too gloriously gifted a creature to be condemned to interment for life in the bogs of Connaught! For my own part I love Willersville, and its daily haunts and ancient neighbourhood; yet I own I should find it difficult to reconcile my patience to a permanent residence there; and Florence with all her elegance and all her exquisite talents, is worthy of a far nobler destiny. As it is, the devotion of London will be at her feet; rich, noble, beloved,—she will surely find in the society of a man so highly bred and so ingratiating as Lord Forreston, a sufficient compensation for the uncouth tenderness of a raw Galway ——"

"Hush! hush! no treason touching a Mit-

ford! and remember, if you really wish to conquer the heart of Florence for your friend, you must do it by the gentlest and most imperceptible measures. Let her be assured that Forreston is really and faithfully attached to her; the wonders that compassion will work in a female heart are unimaginable. Above every thing, avoid Theodosia's interference; for although she has abandoned all hope and expectation of her favourite's marriage with Harry, I forewarn you that she has a worse than indifferent opinion of Lord Forreston's habits and morals, and that *she* at least will never transfer her advocacy to *his* cause."

But even in this instance, Helen was not hopeless; for there was another member of her little *coterie* who had been equally hostile to his interests on other occasions, and who now cordially seconded his views—her husband!—Lord Willersdale, duly forewarned of Forreston's application for the hand of Miss Dudley, and secretly delighted to find his own misgivings thus positively controverted, was earnest in his approval. He insisted upon his lordship's daily re-appearance at his dinner-table; and busied

himself in forming a thousand schemes of pleasure for the little party. There were always drives and walks to be taken,—French plays and operas to be listened to,—and nursery gardens to be visited,—at the suggestion of so considerate a friend.

It might be imagined, with the good understanding now existing between the three, that these parties and these recreations, sought amid the delicious facilities of the delicious days of early summer, became a source of real enjoyment to each. Helen had attained her end; had secured the society of her beloved Florence in that class of life which afforded to both so bright a promise of happiness; and she felt herself on the point of avenging her *protégée* against all the impertinent insults inflicted upon her seeming nothingness by the Brills, Mordaunts, and Lady Julianas. Forreston himself laid to his soul the flattering unction that in sacrificing his inclinations to the peremptory wishes of Lady Willersdale, he was approaching the accomplishment of his own; and that in attaching himself to Helen by a close but unacceptable tie, he was forming the strongest claim upon

her gratitude. Sometimes as he gazed enraptured upon the almost angelic loveliness of her face, his ardent looks scarcely disguised the hopes he had begun to cherish. "What have I not resigned, what would I not resign," they seemed to say, "for the mere chance of winning your approval,—for the certainty of attaching myself yet nearer to your side!"

Yet amid all their exultation, both were secretly self-discontented,—both were manifestly depressed in spirit. Lady Willersdale, notwithstanding that she had long since banished from her remembrance the solitary instance of Seymour's presumption with regard to herself, remained perfectly aware that he had been through life regarded as a man of dissolute habits; nor could she blind herself to the fact of Florence Dudley's attachment to another. Not yet wholly corrupted by the vanities of society, she could scarcely reconcile to her conscience her promotion of a marriage thus doubly unjustifiable; and she was forced to repress its intrusive clamours by a perpetual recurrence to all her recently acquired maxims of worldly wisdom,—to a hollow self-assurance

of Lord Forreston's reformation,—and to an exemplification of her own marriage, in proof that love more readily follows than precedes the fatal ceremony of matrimony.

But Lord Forreston had still greater difficulties to encounter in the communings of his solitude. From the first moment of his acquaintance with Miss Dudley, he had admired and respected her; he beheld in her a being more richly endowed with beauty and accomplishment than any woman gracing the circle in which she moved—yet absolutely free from their tone of *forfanterie*, their affectation, and interested meanness. And to take her unto a heart beating with passion for another,—to delude her with professions of affection which he did not even wish to feel!—the treachery of such an act revolted him! Had he been utterly indifferent to her, and to her prospects of happiness,—had she even been a mere Lady Juliana C——, or Lady Anne Gardiner, he would have married her without one compunctious struggle; but he felt that Florence Dudley had claims upon a happier destiny than that to which she was secretly sentenced. He enter-

tained sanguine expectations that she would refuse his proffered hand—that she was still true to the remembrance of her ungrateful lover;—but then what became of his views upon Lady Willersdale,—what became of the Bobadil interference of her indignant brother!

Florence alone, wholly unconscious of the projects and the mental arguments in busy activity around her, retained her usual gentle air of feminine equanimity;—nay, more!—piqued by the consciousness of undeserved injury, and eager to drive from her recollection the treacherous enemy by whom she had been so gracelessly insulted, she assumed at times an unwonted air of gaiety, and would even rally her two friends upon their pre-occupation and depression of spirits. Day after day, as they sat dreaming away their idle mornings in the seclusion of the holly-walk adjoining Kensington Palace,—listening to the luxurious music of the blackbirds by which its ancient yew-trees are so profusely populated,—*she* alone found voice to exult in the blossomed brightness of summer,—to illustrate its thousand varying attributes, and

to describe its still sweeter fragrance and still brighter hues, among the mossy woods and briary ravines of Willersville.

To Lord Forreston, indeed, those six mortal days of suspense were horrible;—horrible in their brevity—horrible in their endless length! He had hitherto believed his own heart to be so utterly ossified by its worldly experience, that his increasing perturbation roused his indignation against himself. *He*—Ferdinand Seymour—the calm philosopher of fashion—the mighty regent of the kingdom of *ton*—*he* to be disturbed and harassed, sleeping and waking, by the unsupported claims of the obscure nursling of an Irish curate!—He despised himself for the unconscious retention of one single natural feeling; and during the whole of the fifth evening, which he passed by Lady Willersdale's side in the public seclusion of her opera-box, he could not sufficiently conquer his reluctance to utter one word of common courtesy to her companion, although he saw that Captain Mordaunt's observation was undeviatingly fixed upon his movements.

"What will you give me for my news?" said Lord Mellerton, entering the box in the course of the ballet.

"Private or public!"

"Public! who cares to be a retailer of aught save domestic gossip?

The tales *I* tell are of the human heart."

"And of which among its numerous sections?"

"Love, of course!—Love, and matrimony. There is a particular crisis of the London season, as well as a peculiar moment of a parliamentary debate, in which people pair off on all sides. The matrimonial juncture is the critical week between lilies of the valley and roses—between green peas and strawberries;—*enfin le moment actuel. Nous y sommes—nous y sommes!* and two matches are already on the *tapis.*"

"*Two?*"

"Forreston! you need not busy yourself so actively with your *lorgnette;* I do not at present include *you* in my list: your name is merely down in the prospectus I made out last night

at Devonshire House, from my detection of certain couples lurking behind doors, or sentimentalizing in the embrasures of windows."

"Helen! Lady Isabella is kissing her hand to you from the Duchess of Castleton's box."

"Ah!" resumed Lord Mellerton, "she fancies you are already as well informed as herself. She sent me over as ambassador extraordinary to announce an illustrious alliance,—and behold I am still in my preamble."

"Pray proceed to particulars."

"In order that, having picked the flower, you may throw away the worthless stem! *Allons, donc, essuyons notre sort!* To 'rouse you in a rattling peal of thunder,' Miss Dudley, know that your rejected adorer, Lord Bernard Neville, marries Lady Anne Gardiner! It is the only original act of his life, and consequently the most absurd."

"Absurd? I look upon it as a marvellous instance of self-knowledge," said Forreston. "He has secured a foil more frivolous than himself, and a wife who is able and willing to talk for two."

"I am grieved that I cannot astonish you,

for I fear the second branch of my intelligence will not prove a novelty to Lady Willersdale—Mr. Daly forming part of her illustrious household."

"William Daly!—oh! that affair is a mere *réchauffé*—Miss Forsyth refused him two months ago."

"*Miss Forsyth!—mes vœux sont déjà exaucés!* Miss Forsyth!—he has risen cent. per cent. since that attachment. His grandfather, or uncle, or some equally convenient relative broke his neck, instead of the restive colt he was riding the other day; and it appears that his father is now a Sir Marmaduke, or a Sir Something or other Daly, with a Connaught Castle, and an iligant bit of bog."

"Poor Sir William Daly! I had not heard of his death!" said Lady Willersdale feelingly.

"The intelligence arrived only to-day; and the young secretary, instead of busying himself about a suit of sables, or a new cabriolet, as other heirs might have done, flies to C. House with an abstract of his rent-roll;—and with the gracious sanction of my Lord Mar-

quess of Carabas, wooes and wins on the spot the hand of my fair cousin Juliana!"

"William Daly and Lady Juliana C—— the exclusive!—impossible!"

"Eight years ago, I should have echoed your opinion; but young ladies are like certain annuity deeds, which diminish in annual value by a regular per centage. The date of Lady Ju.'s presentation explains the mystery."

"*Date!*—oh, fie!—the initials A and D should be prefixed to nothing but peerages and port wine."

"True,—but Time writes a tolerably legible hand; and the human face is an intolerably open scroll. However, Lady Juliana is not more than six or eight years older than her *futur*."

"I own I am still incredulous," said Lady Willersdale.

"It is a base action to taunt me into betraying my authority; but 'if you will understand me to be speaking ex-officially,' as Pomposo Brill phrases it, I will reveal to you that Lady C. herself applied this very evening to

Lady Isabella Vyvyan's good information touching the fortunes and dignities of her future son-in-law. And Lady Isabella having duly sworn to the antiquity of the Daly family, the existence of the iligant bog, and Sir Marmaduke's power of settling five thousand a year on his only son, a gracious affirmative confirmed the young secretary's pretensions."

"*Five!*—the new Lady Daly would offer ten, as a bribe to any Lady Juliana in the land, to become her daughter-in-law."

"You will give me leave then, on returning to Lady Isabella, to assure her that you have been as much surprised as her utmost humanity could desire?"

"Certainly!—and pray beg her to include me in her visits to-morrow; I should like to drive with her to Lee and Kennedy's."

Lord Forreston looked reproachfully at Helen; for he was persuaded she was anticipating the communication of his own engagement with Miss Dudley, which the morrow's post would probably confirm; and he remained silent and dispirited during the final act of the ballet.

On the following morning, however, he entered the drawing-room in Hamilton Place, with a countenance so irradiated, as to satisfy even Lady Willersdale,—he had all the joyous animation becoming a prosperous lover! In a few minutes he contrived to dispel her illusion, by inquiring whether she had received any Irish letters;—and in reply to her negative, he observed with a smile of self-gratulation that *he* had been equally unfortunate.

Discontented both with the fact, and with the manner of its announcement, Helen hastily resumed her *broderie* to conceal her vexation; while Lord Forreston, re-assured by this temporary respite, seated himself beside Miss Dudley's drawing-table, and affected to be vehemently interested in her performance—a series of sketches of the places of public amusement in London, destined to enliven one of the chambers of Willersville rectory on her return.

"Since Lady Willersdale does us the honour *de nous bouder*, for I can scarcely believe that even the day-light demanded by the Arachne's web she is weaving, requires her to turn her

back so determinately upon us, I shall confine to your private ear, Miss Dudley, a very interesting piece of intelligence of the Mellerton class."

"Nay! do not place me in exile!" cried Helen, rolling her *fauteuil* nearer to the table. "Let me have my appropriate share of *les on dits du jour*; they are lost upon Florence; she cares not for our *clique*, and stands against us as an enemy."

"Oh! mine is no *on dit*—it is a 'we are authorized to state.' I have Wilmington's express permission to acquaint you that his marriage with Lady Alberville will be celebrated before the close of the season."

"Clarence Wilmington's name coupled with the word marriage! *Incroyable!*"

"*Quoique peu vraisemblable—rien n'est plus vrai.*"

"Poor Lady Danvers! what a conclusion to her expectations,—to her attachment!"

"*Her* attachment! Her ladyship, I suspect, has attached herself during her long life to only two individuals,—to Honoria Willersdale—and

Honoria Danvers. She has loved neither father, mother, brother, husband, child, nor friend."

"She sacrificed, at least, her *reputation* to Mr. Wilmington."

"Still less!—I cannot, with the best of memories, recollect Lady Danvers as the proprietress of any such appendage. Her reputation was *sacrificed*,—and a sorry *holocauste* it was at the best—about sixteen lovers ago."

"Pray remember, Lord Forreston, that you are speaking of Willersdale's sister."

"Even that circumstance I can with difficulty recall to my mind; having witnessed her unsisterly, her unwomanly, her unnatural conduct towards yourself."

"Lord Forreston is determined to leave me no pause for the expression of *my* amazement," interrupted Florence, willing to change the conversation. "While you both upbraid Mr. Wilmington's treachery, be it *my* province to express my astonishment at Lady Alberville's inconstancy;—Lady Alberville! whom we have always heard assigned, my lord, as your own plighted love,—and who is

certainly booked in Lord Mellerton's list as your future bride."

"I thank you both for the assignment," replied Lord Forreston, evidently piqued by her tone of irony. "I am accountable for many sins, and am willing to resign myself to signal retribution; but spare me, ye relentless Fates! spare me a marriage with what is called a woman of the world."

"Yet I can scarcely presume to fancy," said Florence—the remainder of the sentence expired unuttered upon her lips; for at that moment Vernon, throwing open the door with an air of particularly good information, advanced towards Lady Willersdale,—and announced "Mr. Edwards!!"

CHAPTER XI.

My father! methinks I see my father!—*Hamlet.*

If I have appeared remiss in my assertion of Mr. Edwards's paternal authority, and negligent in my reference to the ceaseless vigilance with which it was secretly exerted over his ward, the omission has been any thing rather than inconsiderate or irreverent.

From the moment Florence Dudley had been separated from his side, there was scarcely an hour in which his tender solicitude had not been directed towards her well-being; nor a week in which he had not frequently relieved his anxiety by addressing to herself the tenderest expression of his ardent interest in her happiness,—of his fervent trust in her excellence.

As Wilson beautifully expresses a painful truth,

> It is the curse of absence that our love
> Becomes too tender for our distant friends!

But those epistles, as well as the affectionate counsels of Lady Theodosia's correspondence with Miss Dudley, were conceived in a spirit too holy, and uttered in a tone too sacred, to be contaminated by association with pages so frivolous as these. The intimate affection existing between a child and parent, preserves an almost religious character; such love is the *piety of the heart;* and its oracles should be hallowed beyond the profanation of levity!

Florence was the first to observe the startling entrance of her guardian, and flinging her pencils to the ground, she was in his arms in a moment.

"My father!—my dear kind friend!" she exclaimed, sobbing with emotion.

Mr. Edwards having kissed her forehead with an air of inward benediction, strove to disentangle himself from her embrace as he advanced to receive the extended hand of Lady Willersdale.

"You are most welcome," she exclaimed, with a cordial smile. "Your presence is the kindest and most satisfactory reply you could have vouchsafed us. Permit me to present to you, my friend Lord Forreston; Mr. Edwards of Willersville," she continued turning towards the latter.

Both gentlemen advanced towards each other with a gesture of courtesy; but suddenly pausing,—and after a moment's mutual scrutiny,—Lord Forreston staggered back to the sofa.

"*Charles Eliot!*" he exclaimed in an agonized voice; while the guardian of Florence clasped his hands together, and recoiled with horror from the sound.

"Seymour!" at length he faltered, while his quivering lips scarcely seemed to obey his own impulsion. "Seymour!—monster!—murderer!—was not the measure of your crimes exhausted!—must my poor innocent girl become their last—worst sacrifice!"

For an instant Lord Forreston attempted to resume his accustomed composure, to regain his usual air of scornful superiority. But it might not be!—nature prevailed, even over

the hardened immobility of the man of the world!

"Eliot!" said he, in a subdued voice—"with you and your indignation I feel that I have no right to resentment. Upbraid me as you will,—but answer me!—Does Lilias—does the lost, injured, unhappy Lilias yet live?—does she—can she forgive me!"

Again the person thus eagerly addressed wrung his hands in bitterness of spirit, and appeared to writhe beneath the consciousness of former wrongs, of present suffering.

"Does she *live!*—and do *you* ask it?—Oh! no—no—no!—there was but the grave to cover a sorrow such as hers,—to shelter her from a villain such as her destroyer!—Wretch!" he exclaimed with a sudden accession of despair—"wherefore have you hunted me through life from every abiding place of my hope—wherefore have you thus marked me out for shame and sorrow?—I was happy—I was beloved—and you took her from me,—bowed down her innocence to the dust—blighted the sweet promise of her youth by a death of agony."

"She is then no more!" murmured For-

reston, regardless of his violence. "Your curses—your abhorrence are indeed justified."

"Had Lilias been alone your victim," resumed Mr. Eliot, his voice broken by sobs, "had her life, had my happiness been the concluding sacrifice, I had silenced my reviling.—But now—now—in the calmness of your maturity—now that the vile promptings of your intemperate youth are silenced—even now have you stolen to my fold, to crush the last hope of my existence,—to delude the child of Lilias into your treacherous snare."

Lord Forreston started and fixed his earnest gaze upon the speaker.

"Oh! Florence—Florence—my dear wretched girl!"—resumed Eliot, gathering her into his arms as he spoke, yet without trusting himself to look upon her face, "in lavishing your affection on yonder libertine, did no evil presentiment,—no misdoubting of crime forewarn your heart"——he paused.

"Speak on, Sir! in mercy," said the trembling Florence.

"That you—even *you*—were the child of

his sin!—that your lover—your husband—was your own accursed father!"

A frantic shriek interrupted him; but it burst not from the lips of Miss Dudley. It was the self-accusing Helen who had yielded to the excess of her emotion:——Florence, with a face as white as marble, and speechless lips, was already at her father's feet!

"Speak to him!" said she at length, as with trembling arms, and an air of profound consternation he raised her to his heart, "tell him that whatever may have been your fault, you are innocent—we are *both* innocent, of this horrible crime. My dearest, best friend!—my kindest protector!" said she, turning towards her guardian, "Believe in my earnest assurance that Lord Forreston has never, *never* either sought or won my love. He has been to me but as a courteous friend!—Even the tenderness of a daughter towards him, I have yet to learn."

Lord Forreston seated her gently by his side, for he was no longer able to sustain himself. "Eliot!" he exclaimed, after a moment's suspended breathing, "that I have sinned against

you I know ;—cruelly and grossly sinned against you;—but my soul has ever done you the justice of that repentant respect so much your due. Answer me then—for my trust hangs absolutely on your word—is this girl truly my daughter—the daughter of Lilias—the living evidence of my worthlessness?"

"I would that I could deny it, and still withhold her from the pollution of such parentage. I had promised her expiring mother that she should never look upon her father's face ;—but an incestuous marriage brooks no further concealment. Yes! as Heaven hears my assertion —Florence is your child—ay! according to your national laws—*your legitimate daughter.* My legal proofs shall instantly confirm her rights."

"It shall not need!—it shall not need!" cried Lord Forreston, kissing the pale and tearful cheek which now reclined upon his shoulder. "God knows with what eagerness I shall render her every possible reparation for her unhappy mother's injuries. *She* rejected my repentance — disclaimed my tenderness ; — Florence! will *you* be less merciful—will *you*—

will *you* my dear Florence, accept the penitence —the tardy affection of your guilty father?"

She pressed his hand in reply. "My mind is so unprepared," she said, "for these overpowering changes!—I see before me an unknown father—and the kind, the generous, the tender protector of my orphan youth;—how can I comprehend—how learn to divide your several rights upon me!"

"Time, and the mercy of Heaven, my dear child, will restore you to your peaceful self!" replied Mr. Eliot, accepting her offered hand. "You have been the joy of my life, Florence! the consolation of my sorrows—our obligations are mutual!—I shall not envy your father such love as you can bestow."

Miss Dudley, withdrawing herself from Lord Forreston's bewildered embrace, now perceived that Lady Willersdale had dragged her trembling frame towards the open window, and was gasping with intense agitation. She flew to her assistance, and hastened, although sufficiently unequal to the effort, to support her faltering steps towards her own apartment.

Mr. Eliot, unable to tranquillize his hurried

movements, now unconsciously murmured to himself, as he paced the room she had left—"I cannot doubt her—from her cradle I never detected a falsehood on her lips; yet, wherefore should he demand my consent to his addresses, had he been indeed indifferent?"

"Mr. Eliot!" said Lord Forreston, overhearing his words, and removing the hands with which he had concealed his tearful face; "seek, I beseech you, no further into a mystery which criminates me only in a quarter, wherein neither yourself nor Florence can claim an interest. I am accountable to Heaven for many an erring intention in which you have no share. In seeking her hand, I entertained projects which I must yet and deeply atone; but it would have been a marriage of indifference on my side—on hers, of aversion. But this house is no longer an abiding-place for me. Farewell, Sir! I do not ask your forgiveness—there are some virtues impossible—even to a heart like yours. I do not thank you for the protection of my child—you have your best reward in her innocent tenderness." His voice faltered. "You will remain here, and see her for me. Assure her

once more of my affection; tell her she shall hear from me without delay; but at present my courage is unequal to a fresh interview."

Before Mr. Eliot could reply, he had left the room, the house; the scene of all his guilty hopes, and of a discovery that rendered them so awfully unavailing!—

* * * * * *

It was some hours after this agonizing scene, that Lady Willersdale, with swollen eyes and trembling footsteps, entered her husband's library. Mr. Eliot, who had been his companion, rose respectfully as she traversed the room; but Lord Willersdale, who was busily occupied at his writing table, did not so much as raise his eyes from his employment. With a heart already overflowing, Helen could not support this evidence of his anger; throwing herself on a sofa, she concealed her face in the cushions and wept bitterly. Mr. Eliot gently approached her to whisper words of kindness and consolation; but Lord Willersdale—how different from his ordinary demeanour—his usual tenderness,—remained immoveable!

The worthy Eliot, becoming gradually con-

scious that some misunderstanding must exist between parties whom he had been accustomed to behold united by the most intimate fervour of conjugal affection, now made a movement to withdraw; his delicacy of mind suggested that his presence must be an unwelcome restraint in such a crisis.

"Pray, do not go," faltered Lady Willersdale, perceiving his intention, and speaking with a determined effort.—"I could wish, Sir, that you were a witness to my humiliation—that you would deign to listen to the confession I am anxious to make."

Lord Willersdale gave an involuntary start; yet still mechanically continued his previous occupation.

"You," resumed Helen, "from whose lips I have gathered better precepts than I have allowed myself to follow; you, who have been one of my best monitors, may still aid me by your reproval, and sustain me by your future counsel."

Again her tears flowed fast; and Mr. Eliot, with the air of paternal benevolence he had long imbibed through his affectionate vigilance over another, seated himself kindly beside her, but

with an averted face that seemed to shun inquiry into the emotions of her heart.

"Console yourself, Lady Willersdale," said he, mildly—"Let us hope that you judge yourself too harshly; had your actions been of a character so blamable as these bitter tears might lead us to infer, they would not—no! they *could* not have been shed in *this* presence. Console yourself; and remember that our true condemnation rests in the hands of a Judge, more merciful to our weakness than the opinions of our fellow-men."

"It is not the judgment of others,—it is not the opinion of the world from which I shrink," she replied, in a tone of deep humility, "it is from my own!—it is from the accusal of my secret conscience. I alone can judge how deeply I have sinned—"

"Lady Willersdale!" exclaimed her husband, dashing his pen from his hand, and starting from his chair, "Be silent!—If you have become undeserving of my love—surrender your claims; if you are unworthy the shelter of my roof, leave it!—Be satisfied, madam, be satisfied that you have stained the honour of my name—

that you have withered my heart there where its pulse beat warmest; but spare me the recital—spare me an unavailing humiliation. I could bear much from you—*much!*—but do not let me hear how deeply,—when,—wherefore,—by whom,—I have been betrayed; or I might forget myself, and wreak that vengeance on a woman, which another shall satiate with his very heart's blood!" And he burst into a convulsion of hysteric sobs, as though the agony of his soul were no longer controllable.

Helen, too, rose from her seat. Her first impulse was to rush towards that bosom which she had never before beheld thus fiercely agitated; but she checked her eager steps. She saw that she had been misconceived; that her self-accusal had been severely misinterpreted; and she presumed not to seek that fond embrace whence, for the first time, she anticipated rejection.

"He wrongs me! indeed he wrongs me," she exclaimed with her hands uplifted imploringly towards Mr. Eliot.

"*I* wrong *you!*" said Lord Willersdale drawing up his dignified person with an air of

conscious injury. "*I* wrong you, Helen!—and who has injured, who has betrayed, who has crushed *me*—my hopes of happiness,—my domestic peace,—my trust,—my fond, fervid trust in your seeming truth?—Oh! woman,—woman! *why* did I so love you,—so doat on you,—so confide in you!"

"Willersdale! you deal too harshly with a penitent heart," interposed his friend, sustaining the shuddering Helen as he spoke. "Render to your wife at least the justice of hearing her exculpation."

"Of hearing?—No—no!—I have been too long deceived by her plausible representations. No, no! you know not by what cunning arts she has hitherto disarmed my suspicions, and deluded me into self-security!—Ask her—or rather answer me, Helen! answer your abused and miserable husband; have you not daily, hourly, deceived me into endurance of that man's accursed society,—have you not beguiled me into making him my guest,—my inmate;—persuading me of his devotion to another, even while you knew that other to be the offspring of his own licentious youth?"

"And you can believe me capable of all this!" said Lady Willersdale, clasping her hands together. "You can believe me guilty of such horrible falsehood,—such base, such deliberate wickedness!" and the sense of injury appeared to restore her failing fortitude. "Shall I—need I—reply to such accusations?" she continued appealing to Mr. Eliot.

"Be forbearing where you seem to claim forbearance," replied the Christian pastor with earnest solemnity.

"Then have I done *none* of these things—or I have done them through a misconception equalling your own. The world's report and my own conviction long ago assured me that Lord Forreston was a libertine; and as such I ought to have shunned his society. Lady Theodosia, I knew, entertained the worst opinion of his morals;—but I guessed not, I dreamed not that she had framed her judgment from her knowledge of his relationship to Florence. And what—I beseech you—what can induce you to believe that I would so perilously conceal my consciousness of that connexion?—what motive

can you assign for my wilful blindness, or wilful deceit ?"

" Your desire to secure at any hazard the society of your minion—of your *lover !*"

Again Lady Willersdale appeared startled into firmer self-possession. " I *will* no longer reply to charges so gross, so cruel as these ;" said she, again addressing Mr. Eliot ; " but *you*, Sir, must receive my vindication. Lord Willersdale accuses me of guile, of shamelessness, such as I trust the worst of women have rarely practised ; for my own part, I stand before Heaven with a conscience pure from even one glancing thought such as he has ascribed to me. Mr. Eliot !—you are the minister of God ;—from your mouth I have been accustomed to receive the assurances of His mercy,—from your hands the cup of peace ;—and when the grave shall close over my remains, it is your voice that will hallow it with a promise of immortality. To you therefore I may utter my confession without the reproach of guile, or suspicion of falsehood ;—for how could I presume to deceive my intermediator with Heaven ?—As

that Heaven is my witness,—I am innocent of any thought, or word, or deed, injurious to the honour of my husband;—it is against myself only that I have sinned—against my better judgment;—and even there, only so far as my present humiliation may fully atone!"

Lord Willersdale struggled for breath in the painful—yet welcome revulsion of his feelings. He was satisfied!—and sank upon a chair, screening his tearful countenance from observation that he might listen in joyous self-abandonment to Helen's further communications.

"I have said that I believed Lord Forreston to be a libertine; yet instead of shrinking with womanly purity from his society, I made him my companion—my chosen associate. Dazzled by the glare of fashion shed upon his faults, I was vain of his attendance, and sought by every means in my power to encourage his devotion to my friend. And there—there was I most wantonly, and treacherously to blame. Although I knew *him* to be devoid of principle—although I knew the heart of Florence to be devoted to another, yet in favour of his rank, and riches, and popularity, I would have wil-

lingly polluted the sacred marriage vow, by persuading her to become his wife. I have permitted my own mind and feelings to bow to no higher influence than the mere promptings of sordid worldliness; waking from my guilty dream, I feel—I own—that I have lost sight of every holier guide,—have lived in indifference to all save the pleasures, the frivolous pleasures of the passing hour; and gladly would I have beguiled the friend committed to my charge, into my own errors, my own heartless folly."

"The mercy of heaven interposed," said Mr. Eliot, deeply affected, "and I feel that it has not been bestowed in vain."

"When I consider," resumed Lady Willersdale, "by how awful a retribution my fault might have been visited, when I think in how horrible a crime my levity might have become instrumental, I shudder to recognize its full extent of evil; and am penetrated with gratitude for my escape."

"Helen!" said Lord Willersdale, approaching her with an outstretched hand, "can you,—will you forgive my exaggeration,

—my misinterpretation of your self-accusation?"

Lady Willersdale threw herself into his arms, and sobbed out her grateful desire of mutual forgiveness.

"I have been much to blame," she said, "but *you* too have been in error; not in your recent suspicion of my fidelity,—*that* I regard as a frantic suggestion of jealousy—but in leaving me as you have done, to the frivolous impulses of youth,—in devoting your whole time and consideration to public questions, without sparing one word of admonition, one restraining counsel, to the wife whom you have sworn to cherish, and whom it was your duty to strengthen by your better judgment."

"Too true!" exclaimed Lord Willersdale, folding her in his arms.

"Long, long ago, I bade you shield me from the temptations of the world: I acknowledged my own weakness, and prayed you to abandon me less carelessly to its guidance. Yet again, and wholly unsupported, you have urged me to brave the perils of society; nor has your lavish hand once appeared tenacious of its rights, till

you believed they had already escaped its grasp."

"And can you have been so blind to all my anxieties?" interrupted Lord Willersdale. "Surely, surely, you must have perceived the intense interest with which I have silently noted your every movement—your every predilection. Had it not been for his attentions to Miss Dudley, and for your repeated confirmation of the fact, think you I should have allowed a man so dangerous as Forreston to retain his constant station by your side? At Richmond—in London—I have unceasingly, though secretly, suffered torments of jealous suspense."

"Then in mercy to us both, never hereafter afford them the occasion of being renewed! You are well aware that I derive no support from the counsels of my own family; nor among my female companions, with the exception of the Duchess of Castleton, have you presented me a single friend on whom I can rely. It is therefore incumbent on yourself either to accompany me into the crowd, or to suffer me to withdraw myself from its dangers. For the present year, a thousand circumstances forbid my re-appear-

ance in society; for the next—new and peremptory ties will, I trust, reinforce my present faithful resolution."

Again Lord Willersdale strained her to his bosom. "And our dear Florence," said he, "how does she meet this bewildering change of destiny?"

"As becomes her—with mingled thankfulness and grief for the mysterious origin of her birth. I have persuaded her to lie down and rest, for she has suffered severely."

"I am perplexed," said Lord W. addressing himself to Mr. Eliot, "in what manner to admit Lord Forreston's claims; for in acquitting my poor Helen of any share in his views, my suspicions of himself remain unabated; and this house he shall never re-enter."

Mr. Eliot, who perceived the mischief he had unintentionally done by acquainting Lord Willersdale with Forreston's eagerness to disclaim an attachment to Florence Dudley, and the construction inevitable upon such a declaration attempted to qualify his resentment by affixing a general doubt on the veracity of a man so unprincipled.

" This house," persisted Lord Willersdale, he shall never enter again."

On the following day, the difficulties arising from such a determination were satisfactorily removed. A letter addressed " to the Honourable Miss Seymour," was placed in the trembling hands of Florence, bearing the signature of Lord Forreston, and dated from Dovor ;— he had already sailed for the Continent!

CHAPTER XII.

I speak not, I trace not, I breathe not thy name,
There is grief in the sound, there were guilt in the fame.
But the tear which now burns on my cheek, may impart
The deep thought that dwells in that silence of heart!

Byron.

"FLORENCE! I may not presume to address you as my daughter; for I have not yet acquired the feelings that sanction such a tie. Forgive me that I have left England without seeing you again; but till I feel those paternal promptings within my soul—till I can welcome my child with the triumphant exultation she deserves—we must not meet. I am still a slave to the world, Florence, I am still sensitive to the scoffs of the idle and the worthless;—I will strive for your sake to conquer so paltry a weakness, that I may learn to fold you to my

bosom undisturbed by the sneers of society, and the comments of the crowd.

"Yet do not utterly despise me! Remember that the whole position of my life has been one of involuntary deception; that I have been a husband and a father, unconscious of my own responsibility. Had I been aware of your existence, had I known that there lived a being—and *such* a being,—who perhaps would have loved me for my own sake, and on whose affections I held the holiest and most peremptory bond of nature, I should have been a sadder and a better man. All the endearments of your infantine tenderness have been withheld from me; all the incitements of seeking to merit your respect. I fancied myself a being having none to injure by my vices, none to disgust by my follies;—what marvel then, that both should have expanded with such luxuriant growth!—But it was not of myself I thought to speak in commencing this letter; your own interests and your own prospects demand my immediate attention.

"I have received the proofs of your legitimacy referred to by Mr. Eliot; and accompanied by a recital that has riven my very heart. Seek

not into it! Florence—seek not into that horrible story, or you will teach yourself to abhor your repentant father. I was very young,—intemperate,—mad!—ruined by false indulgence and pmareture luxury. But I offer not pleas such as these in extenuation of my worthlessness:—its full extent becomes evident to me in the retrospective agony of the present hour!—

"As the most effective mode of recognizing your claims upon me, I have made them explicitly known to Lady Gertrude Wentworth. She loves you already, Florence!—she it was who detected your resemblance to me to her favourite sister; and who in her partiality urged me to seek your hand. But you have now another hold upon her affections; she knew your miserable mother—admired her, loved her, was an eye-witness to the progress of my hopeless attachment—a mourner in the mysterious scene which seemed to terminate its prospects;—and estimating the excess of my own guilt, I am persuaded she will offer the reparation of her fondest interest to the innocent child of Lilias. I should have even bequeathed you to her immediate protection, but that your cousin, Henry

Mitford, is at present an inmate under her roof. It was there indeed I became acquainted with your lover; and I now remember with delight the uncourteous coldness with which he received my advances to his friendship; for it is an evidence in my eyes of his faithful attachment for my child. How could he regard with less than detestation a man whom the world's, and Lady Gertrude's report assigned as her accepted lover? —In two instances I have been undeservedly favoured by fortune; as a stranger, dear Florence, I won my way to your confidence, and learnt to esteem and admire the parity and gentleness of your character; and as a distant kinsman, I was enabled to judge the excellence of one, whom I trust hereafter to welcome as your husband. I know that Mitford will hasten to profit by an explanation which restores you to his hopes; perhaps he is already at your feet. Let me therefore prematurely re-assure you by my eager sanction of his addresses, that your engagement shall be forwarded with the promptliberality which my daughter, *my heiress*, has a right to command.

"To Lord and Lady Willersdale what thanks,

what excuses—can I—dare I offer?—My determination to intrude no more into their presence will I trust favour my anxious desire that they should altogether dismiss me from their remembrance! Their kindness, and the counsels of your good, your excellent protector, will form your best guidance in the prospects which I see opening before you. Your father's agents have already his orders to seek and fulfil your wishes in every respect; but the office of bestowing your hand at the altar will fall to the share of one who has better—far better deserved it! Blessings be upon you, Florence! blessings purer and dearer than *I* can venture to invoke.

"FORRESTON."

The anticipations expressed by Lord Forreston were justified with bewildering rapidity. Harry Mitford, undeceived in all his jealous misconceptions, was eager to claim the affections of his newly-found cousin, under a still more precious privilege; and Lady Gertrude, in the happy prospects of reuniting the scattered branches of her family-tree, was moved to an enthusiasm of joy overcoming all her indignation

against the worthless Forreston, and all her sympathy in the fatal destinies of Lilias Sinclair. So gracious was her mood, and so overflowing the triumph of her pride, that she readily consented,—at the entreaty of the considerate aud judicious Duchess of Castleton,—to sanction the pretensions of her new relative by making her appearance in Lady Willersdale's circle at the *petit souper* of the following Saturday; an arrangement materially advantageous to all parties.

It is not to be supposed that Vernon had been negligent of his perquisites of office, during the recent *dénouement*. By dint of listening, and peeping, and conjecturing, he had speedily acquainted himself with almost all the intricacies of the affair; and the temptation of advancing forty pounds sterling through the trifling deficit still existing in the indispensable thousand, soon laid the valuable narrative he had concocted, at the mercy of every editor in London. Through some interposition miraculous in the eyes of the actors in the drama, "The recent catastrophe in high life," formed a simultaneous paragraph in all the newspapers of the

day; and the thousand tongues of rumour were for once amply busied, in the thousand exaggerations and *broderies* which ensued. Helen and Florence, equally eager to withdraw themselves from the attention of the public, obtained Lord Willersdale's sanction to their immediate removal to Richmond; but the Duchess of Castleton, to whose friendly counsels they had referred themselves, would not hear of such a measure. "So precipitate a flight," said she, "would confirm all the illiberal reports which distress you; —*il faut faire face à l'ennemi.* You must both accompany me to the opera to-morrow night. Let your brother, dearest Lady Willersdale, escort you; and you, Lady Isabella, will, I am persuaded, chaperon Anne Gardner to Lady Willersdale's box. She will thus appear in public, supported by members of both families; and I will do my best in persuading Lady Gertrude to join our supper party; *her* reappearance in the world will occupy all the gossips."

And so it proved. The curiosity of the *beau monde*—curiosity, that leprosy of the idle—united a more than commonly brilliant circle in

Hamilton Place on the appointed evening. And when Lady Gertrude Wentworth's formal figure, powdered head, and splendid diamond girandoles became visible,—like some mummy of departed greatness emerging from the tombs;—and when the handsome young stranger, on whose arm "Miss Seymour" was leaning, was understood to be a Mr. Mitford Wentworth, the acknowledged heir of Lady Gertrude, and the affianced lover of Florence, the unaccountable absence of Lord Forreston was forgotten, and scrutinizing eyes were no longer riveted on Lady Willersdale's lovely countenance. Even Captain Mordaunt was satisfied that scandal had raved herself to rest; and Lady Isabella Vyvyan, in the happy task of communicating all these valuable coincidences to her anxious sister by the following post, reaped the reward so long coveted by her staunch and consistent affection.

The thousand delicate circumstances, and untoward incidents attending the case, rendered it peculiarly desirable, in the opinion of all parties, that the marriage of Florence and her lover should take place without delay; and as

both were equally indifferent to the pomps and vanities of the wicked (or fashionable) world; both equally inaccessible to the overcoming delights of equipage and jewels,—there appeared to exist no reasonable obstruction to their views. At the particular request of Lord Forreston, it had been settled that they should proceed immediately after the ceremony to visit him in Italy;—the travelling-carriage and *trousseau de voyage* had been readily procured; and Lady Gertrude's diamonds were sentenced to a leisurely and post-matrimonial regeneration during their absence.

But the law—that most learned and deliberate profession, which, throughout all seasons and their change, drags its slow length along as if in defiance of human susceptibilities—generally seizes upon the occasion of a wedding to outdrawl its ordinary tedium of delay. Defying the spur of Cupid, the jaded beast jogs on at its own dull and peremptory pace;—and let lovers sigh, or guardians chide,—title deeds and deeds of trust, and deeds of entail, and "deeds without a name," must be perused, amended, and re-indited,—clerkly pens must

be pointed for majuscular flourishes;—and much parchment, and much pounce, and much patience expend themselves, before the legal warrant of Hymen's chancery can be signed, sealed, and delivered! Even the green shades of Richmond were voted an idle indulgence by the pitiless Magnats of the law; in order to restrict whose prolixity within endurable bounds, Harry Mitford was condemned to a daily journey between Hamilton-Place and Gray's Inn Lane; and the Willersdales and Lady Gertrude were forced to recognize the gradual progress of the summer, solely through the shrill and vexatious cries of the Battersea fruit-women.

It was the beginning of August before the lovely Florence was finally attired in her Brussels veil; and there scarcely remained a member of the civilized Christian community existent in the metropolis, to be interested in the intelligence conveyed by the Morning Post, that "On Saturday last was married, at St. George's church, Henry Mitford Wentworth, Esq. of Wentworth Park, in the county of Hants, to the Honourable Florence Dudley Seymour,

only daughter of Lord Forreston."—No special license—no lawn sleeves—no temporary altar! —they were united with earnest solemnity by the fatherly hand of Mr. Eliot; in an open Christian temple, and at a common-place, canonical hour!

The little group was now rapidly dispersed; Lady Gertrude, bridling with triumphant joy, retired to the formalities of her Enfield villa,—the bride and bridegroom crossed the channel,—the Vyvyans followed up their system of reformation and gratitude by domesticating themselves with old Sir Simon in his squirearchical Castle of Indolence in Yorkshire; and the Willersdales eagerly flew to officialize among the suburban shrubberies of Holly Wood. Well was it for all parties, that the bridal settlements and ceremonies had been so opportunely concluded; for a domestic calamity of the most painful nature occurred a few days after their departure, which would have shed a very unwelcome gloom over one of the happiest marriages of the season.

Scarcely had Helen enjoyed for a single week that peaceful domestic existence, which pos-

sessed anew all the charm of novelty, and still and ever, all the varying pleasures which Lord Willersdale's intelligent mind and affectionate heart could impart to conjugal companionship, when one day,—having missed him from her side for a period of unusual absence,—she eagerly sought him in the gardens,—in his own room,—in the library.

The door of the latter was locked from within, thus betraying the presence of its master; but although Lady Willersdale gently yet earnestly claimed admittance, no one stirred to sanction her entrance into the forbidden room. With anxious haste she applied to Vernon for information; and having learned from that general intelligencer that a courier had arrived from town bearing letters, on the receipt of which his lordship had retired to the library, leaving orders that he might be secure from intrusion, she satisfied herself that public business, superseding her own claims, immediately engrossed his attention. Helen, having now acquired the patient self-resignation befitting a minister's wife, retired submissively to her dressing-room to await his leisure; reclining

in happy summer idleness on her couch; listening to the busy murmurs of the bees in her embowered balcony;—and turning with listless luxury the choice pages of a poet, whose lyre might have served to beguile a far more tedious hour.

The hour however *was* tedious, and prolonged far beyond her expectations; and when Lord Willersdale at last entered the apartment, and seated himself gravely by her side, she saw that his eyes were swollen, and his heart too full for utterance. Hastily extending her hand, she pressed his own to her heart in token of sympathy; but presumed not to inquire into the source of so deep a sorrow.

It was some minutes before Lord Willersdale found voice to satisfy the unexpressed anxieties of her affection. "Helen!" said he, with a faltering voice, and after a painful pause, "I have lost my sister—my only sister!"

Lady Willersdale clasped her hands in eager consternation. "Merciful Heaven! Honoria!—and so suddenly!—She spoke of her indisposition as slight—I dreamed not that we had even cause for alarm."

"My dear Helen!—my dear wife," returned Lord Willersdale, lowering his tone to one of intense agony, "therein lies the aggravated misery of the dispensation—the most poignant sting of my loss. Helen! dear Helen!" he continued, covering his face with his hands, "my poor miserable sister—terminated a life of error,—by self-destruction!"

Lady Willersdale started from her seat, and threw herself into his arms; she was horror-struck!—There was no word of consolation which might avail in such a trial!

"She has left me no reflexion,—no remembrance,—no hope, on which I can repose in mitigation of my present affliction," he resumed, in the same subdued voice. "I cannot even beguile myself by the delusion that frenzy, or some convulsive crisis of bewildered feeling became the origin of so dreadful—so rash—so inexpiable an action. No! it was one of deliberate wickedness,—of selfish and cowardly presumption!—My poor, wretched, lost Honoria!"—and in spite of every restraining effort, the tears burst afresh from his eyes!

"And from whom," inquired Helen—when

at length she resumed the command of her faculties, "from whom have you received intelligence of this awful event? Let us still trust that you have been misled by false information."

"Impossible! I have a letter from the eldest of my bereaved and now orphan nieces,—besides a more explicit communication from a respectable English governess, who has resided with them for many years, and a formal document from the Hanoverian ambassador. The fact, alas! is only too painfully certain."

"Still, not even these,—not even the persons nearest and dearest to her, can have positively ascertained the state of her mind at such a moment."

"My dearest wife," murmured Lord Willersdale, with quivering lips, "from *you* I have no right to conceal a single sorrow—a single humiliation. I have a letter from her own dying hand—from the hand which urged her impious intrusion into the presence of her immortal Judge!—a letter of confession—of self-accusal—withering in a moment the fond attachment which my heart, during a long life, had

lavished upon hers. Had any other so reviled her,—had any other branded Honoria's name with the vices—the infamy, she calmly claims as her own,—no earthly power or argument should have won my credence; but the conclusion—the horrible conclusion of her life—avouches at once her shame and desperation."

Helen vainly attempted a qualifying reply. "Of *you*," he continued, "she speaks as you deserve; to you, my dear Helen! Honoria renders a tardy justice, acknowledging herself to have been your unprovoked enemy—your deliberate temptress."

Lady Willersdale started at the word.

"She owns the malicious envy with which she marked the purity of heart and mind that preserved you throughout all her machinations. Even her affected tenderness towards myself, she ascribes to the basest motives: and of her crimes as a wife and a mother, I will not permit myself to speak. It was from the recollection of these she shrank with dismay. Incapable of the hallowed humility of penitence, her soul became embittered by remorse, even against its own existence. A moderate competence afford-

ed no prospect of enjoyment to her luxurious indolence;—no soothing of affection tended to soften the rugged path of her declining life;—self-accusing—mortified—and helpless,—she swallowed poison! as an escape from earthly retribution, to the terrors of that avenging futurity which she presumed to doubt."

Again Lord Willersdale concealed the agonized expression of his countenance.

"And her unhappy orphans?"

"Need I ask you, dearest, to become their mother!"

"If you will so far trust me," eagerly replied Lady Willersdale. "If you still consider me worthy of so precious a deposit! But alas! I have lately learned to be more diffident of myself; and I, who have proved so unstable in my own self-governance, can scarcely aspire to the guidance of others!"

"Now—now, more than ever am I confident of your excellence!" exclaimed her husband, folding her to his heart. "Distrusting yourself, my Helen! you will place your secure reliance on an unfailing Guide; you will become—

you will remain—all that my most sanguine desires could picture. We will adopt these poor girls as our own,—for the first time they shall be blest with a mother's kindness. It will be impossible, at the present moment, for us to leave England; but I will dispatch Vernon with a courier this very night to Rome; and under the protection of Mrs. Winsley, they can immediately return to England. Within a few weeks, Helen, they may be here."

"Independently of their claims upon our love, I shall find them welcome companions. I have already begun to miss my dear Florence, during your temporary absence; and these poor girls will yield me a new object of emulation and exertion—a new motive for meriting your esteem."

Lord Willersdale mingled his thanks with tears of tenderness. In a few hours the necessary preparations were completed; and Helen was already eager to enter upon her new duties. Lord Willersdale, meanwhile, was more horror-struck than afflicted by the cruel event in which they had originated: his conscious wife regarded the fatal end of Lady Danvers rather

as a warning than as a source of sorrow; and it was agreed, by mutual resolution, to recur no more to so painful, so humiliating a topic.

In less than six weeks, a letter of affectionate gratitude from Frederica Danvers, announced the arrival of the little party at Paris; and Lady Willersdale hastened to Hamilton Place, that she might be on the spot to receive and welcome them to their new home. Her mother too was in town, presiding over the appearance of a still junior James in the august line of the House of Forsyth; and Helen, the day following her arrival, betook herself dutifully to Wilton Crescent, to admire her new nephew, as well as to congratulate Lady Mordaunt on the accession of her own son to the long-courted honours of his company in the Guards! Even with her Ladyship he was no longer Jack—but "my son, the Colonel."

Lady Willersdale had prepared herself for a considerable display of maternal importance, under the excitement of this twofold triumph; yet her most inflated anticipations fell short of the fact. Lady Mordaunt appeared to look down even on herself; and sat swelling under

her shawl with an air of dignity rivalling that of *Madame Mère* in her chair of state at the Tuileries, or Mrs. Siddons's Volumnia rising successful from the feet of Coriolanus!—From time to time, she exchanged glances of significant intelligence with poor Jane, whose eyes—"like winking Mary-buds"—half hidden beneath the voluminous Valenciennes garniture of her *bonnet d'accouchée*,—almost presumed to affect a meaning. Lady Willersdale was puzzled; but she perceived that it would be a very useless act of self-degradation to inquire into the mystery;—Lady Mordaunt's lips were evidently sealed as ostentatiously as the tenders for a government contract.

She had scarcely been exposed a quarter of an hour to this tantalizing telegraph of family secrets, when Mrs. Willis-Clinton was announced, and eagerly advanced to pay the compliment of her cousinship to the young mother.

"You will, I trust, favour me," said she, after the usual inquiries, "with a sight of my new little relative." And accordingly, in spite of Lady Mordaunt's reluctance, a nurse of regulation-dimensions:—*i. e.* between the limits

of the Colosseum and those of the wise woman of Brentford,—curtseyed into the room; bearing a little sallow pigmy about the size of a full-grown silk-worm.

"The loveliest babe I ever beheld," exclaimed Mrs. Willis Clinton, in an ecstasy of admiration, "fair as monumental alabaster,"—yet quite an infant Hercules!—The eyebrows, I perceive, are at present red, but they will infallibly fall off; or if not,—the crocus, as the first and most welcome flower of Spring, may fairly rival the rosebud."

Poor Jane blushed like a yellow rose at the insinuation; but even with *her* quarter of an understanding, she was aware that opposition only aggravated the malice of her hyena kinswoman.

"And how very fortunate, my dearest Mrs. James," she resumed, with the most oleaginous impertinence,—"how extremely lucky that your son should arrive at a crisis so momentous to the importance of the Forsyth family!"

"Now," thought Helen, "the secret is bursting forth," and she looked inquiringly towards the cantankerous little woman.

"My uncle, as your ladyship is probably aware," said she, replying to this unuttered query, "is to be gazetted on Saturday in the new batch of baronets."

"Let me wish you joy, Jane! since I conclude it is an event regarded as desirable by the family in general."

"How can it be otherwise!" exclaimed Mrs. Willis, with affected rapture. "He will figure in the list with two physicians and an Irish apothecary; a Scotch banker, a super-annuated Welch judge, and a discarded governor who was shouldered by the late administration out of the dignities of some yellow-fever colony."

"A baronetcy is a distinction, Ma'am, which no association can deteriorate," observed Lady Mordaunt, with a glance of pompous indignation.

"My dear madam,—you are dating its value from the reign of Charles or James; you are thinking of those well-worn honours which, like a military banner, we reverence in proportion to their ragged and poverty-struck antiquity." Again poor Jane assumed a deeper jaundice,—no longer for the Forsyths but for the Mordaunts!

"We hear so much," resumed the shrew, "of throwing the landed interest into the Peerage,—as a sort of weight I conclude, to balance its levity,—that we cannot be surprised when our ministers—(I beg your ladyship's pardon,) complete the equipoize by patching up the baronetage with the ingots of the Royal Exchange.

Qui sert sa patrie n'a pas besoin d'aieux,

and who so serviceable to the land as those whose pineries and armorial bearings,—whose chariots and horsemen, augment the tax revenue, and diminish the poor's rates? I conceive my uncle, Sir James (ahem!) to be as valuable to the state, as if he had fought at Waterloo."

"I am no politician," coldly replied Lady Willersdale; "but I am fully aware of the respect which Mr Forsyth has commanded throughout every period of his useful life."

Poor Jane looked grateful, and Lady Mordaunt gratified.

"I find," resumed Mrs. Willis-Clinton, no whit abashed, "that my aunt has taken Charlotte to Cheltenham, and SAYS that the waters have been repeatedly ordered for herself. She is right—quite right! After a young lady's

third season in town, a course of watering-places is a very judicious alternative. I often congratulate myself, that *my* girls are still young; for I own I enjoy the modest un-Hussared retirement of Sandgate or Broadstairs; and I suppose my time will come for *being ordered* to Brighton and Bath—to Spa or Baden. By the way, my dear Mrs. James, is it true that they saw Prince Auta Nauta in the cage, as they passed through Birmingham? How fortunate that Mrs. Brill was not of the party!—She is staying with the Samuel Skinners, I find, at their place, the Gazebo, at Peckham. I would not mention it—but that we are among friends."

With this last volley of insolence she rose to depart: satisfied that she had left many an arrow rankling in the bosoms of her dear friends and relations;—a cruel contingency, in the insurance of which her busy life was passed.

"Have you heard lately from Beech Park?" inquired Lady Willersdale, to cover the embarrassment of her sister;—and no theme could have been more effective!—Lady Mordaunt's countenance became instantly suffused with smiles; and significant glances were once more exchanged

between the parties. The family mystery was evidently Lilfieldian, and in no way connected with the introduction of a sanguine hand into the escutcheon of the Forsyths. But not a word of explanation ensued.

"I thank you, my dear; my daughter Lilfield is as well as can be expected."

Helen almost wondered whether a crocus had blossomed at Beech Park, as well as in Wilton Crescent.

"Pray, my dear, what is the exact relationship between your friends the Mitfords, and the Delvile family?"

"The mothers of General Mitford and Lord Forreston were aunts to the present Duke; but they have lived so little together, that the Duchess's divorce affects them only with feelings of general regret."

"Oh! I was not sympathizing with them on that profligate woman's account. *Cousins*, you see, my dear Jane!—curious coincidence!"—she continued, nodding across the table to Mrs. Montagu, who smiled significantly over her carpet work.

Lady Willersdale perceived that the mystery

was not to be unravelled for her edification; and unwilling to prolong this pantomime of

Nods, and becks, and wreathed smiles,

she soon took leave.

On the following evening she had the satisfaction of bestowing a cordial welcome upon the three elegant girls who were presented to her as her nieces; and who gratefully claimed her promised protection and maternal kindness. Still under the able care of Mrs. Winsley, they were soon installed at Holly Wood.

CONCLUSION.

It has become so much the custom for idle novelists to "shape their ends," and gather together the scattered threads of their disentangled skein in a comprehensive letter, that I am willing to follow their illustrious example, by placing my beloved public in the confidence of one addressed by Lady Isabella to her friend Lady Willersdale, some eight months after the period of Forreston's departure from England.

"Mitford Lodge, Feb. 183—

"I write to you by the blaze of uncountable bonfires, dearest Lady W—— to announce the triumphal entry of "Mr. and Mrs. Mitford Wentworth on their return from Italy." I did not imagine so many fagots had been spared from the illumination that enlightened the

banks of the Shannon in honour of your son and heir!

Flo is looking lovelier than ever, and is not a little proud of the rapture with which Harry has been welcomed to the estates of his fathers. They have settled themselves at Daly House, which they intend to occupy for a few months every autumn; and if you will promise to visit the Castle with equal punctuality, I—even I—who have renounced Paris and all my sins in compliance with Sir Simon's prejudices, I will persuade Vyvyan to hire Lady Sophia Denny's cottage, (who has migrated with Lizzy and Quizzy to Kemp Town in pursuit of His Majesty's ——th hussars,) in order to form one in the happiest family group existent throughout the three kingdoms. The Dean has just returned to the rectory from his residence at K——a; and I doubt whether Lord Forreston, with whom Florence and her husband have been residing at Leghorn, can have yet learned to look upon his daughter with the rapturous exultation irradiating Eliot's countenance whenever she addresses him. My dear Lady Willersdale,

believe me we are all just now very happy people!

"You ask me for Galway news!—Give me leave to inform you, that little *thilly lithping Fleethy Daly* marries the erudite heir of the O'Gormans! Conceive Lady Daly's delight; and conceive what would be her coach-contracting sire's amazement, could his Smithship peep from his grave, to find himself the father of one ladyship and the grandfather of two; *d'ailleurs figurez vous l'étonnement et le degoût de la belle Julie à pareille apparition!* For once I can sympathize with the lady of Daly Castle; without this mitigation of Harry Mitford's marriage, and of the miraculous honours achieved by dear Flo, I really think her mortifications would have martyrized her beyond even the efficacy of the Bath waters!

"Who is the 'Stentorian Sir Thomas Willis Clinton,' whom you say Charlotte Forsyth has accepted as a *pis-aller?*—Who the Mrs. Willis Clinton you describe as having nearly poisoned herself by biting her own tongue?—And how succeeds the fallen Lucy in the presidency of Brill's *bureau d'esprit?*—Henry Melbourne writes word

to Vyvyan, that our friend, Clarence Wilmington's coronet-matrimonial sits but uneasily on his brow,—*et je m'en réjouis! Celui qui a tant fait souffrir les autres ne doit pas prétendre au bonheur conjugal; c'est une juste vengeance que lui réservoit l'Hymen!*

My brother is enchanted to find that the poor Danvers girls are domesticated under your wing; and desires me to beg you will educate little Susan, the youngest, to make a Lady Barton for him, resembling Lady Willersdale as nearly as possible. By the way, Florence visited the grave of their unfortunate mother in the Protestant cemetery at Rome, where the horrible circumstances attending her death are very generally known. They found it an unnoticed and neglected spot, already overgrown with weeds, and plainly evincing that it had been ungraced by the solicitudes of kindred or of affection. Unhappy woman! an end so appalling,—a memory so degraded as her's, may at least afford a lesson to the heartless puppets with which she delighted to surround herself! Surely no woman ever so idly squandered the gifts of nature,—the favours of fortune!

And now of Theodosia!—mild and moderate in her joy, as she was courageous throughout her privations, she is still the central attraction of all our pride, and all our love! You are probably aware that Florence hastened to devote Lady Gertrude's wedding gift of twenty thousand pounds to the General's extrication from his difficulties; and that during the absence of the Dean, she contrived to transform the rectory into a temple dedicated to all his favourite pursuits. Lady G. has most munificently settled on them ten thousand a-year out of the twenty-five they will inherit at her death; and, retiring to her red-brick villa, she has refitted the mansion in St. James's-square for their town residence. We shall not spare them to you, however, till the close of the spring. *I* too have been extraordinarily liberal to dear Dosy. Since Flo's education was so brilliantly terminated, my poor sister found her Madame-Campan propensities miserably at fault; and, pitying her *désoeuvrement*, I have bequeathed my dear little spoiled Algy to her efforts. By the time he is thoroughly mended, the young heir at the Castle (*je vous en préviens*)

will have grown quite naughty enough to renew her labours.

The Duchess of Delvile's divorce bill, I see, is going through the House. But in mercy to our ignorance, pray tell me what we are to believe touching the report of the Duke's engagement to your sister, Lady Lilfield? Some say he marries her to pique his wife, who detested Beech Park, and all its appertainments;—some say that Lady L. addressed herself to his weak (or agricultural) side, and dedicated to his Grace her pamphlet on "The merits of a cross-breed of Alderney and Durham cattle." She says *herself*, I understand, that she sacrifices her own feelings to the interests of her "seven fatherless babes;"—but *I* say—oh! fie, Lady Lilfield! in your first six months of widowhood, and with a man only half divorced! —oh! fie, Lady Lilfield! oh fie!—Above all, what says your brother—John the downright,—or, I beg his pardon—*the Colonel?* Inform him, in my illustrious name, that as *you* are not to be bribed from your nursery this season, my royal highness elects him as my own *cavaliere servente*, as being the most trustworthy of man-

kind.—*He won't?*—the wretch! I am ashamed of him!

O'Mahoney commends herself to your Ladyship's feet; she tells her beads for your son with a rosary brought for her by Florence from Loretto; and Vyvyan and I commend ourselves to your Ladyship's best affections, till the end of the month of April, when I shall claim them in person. *En attendant je vous embrasse de cœur et d'ame.*

I. V.

These volumes commenced with the description of "*un bon mariage*,"—surely they cannot be more satisfactorily closed than by this propitious detail of the results of "*un mariage délicieux!*"

THE END.

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